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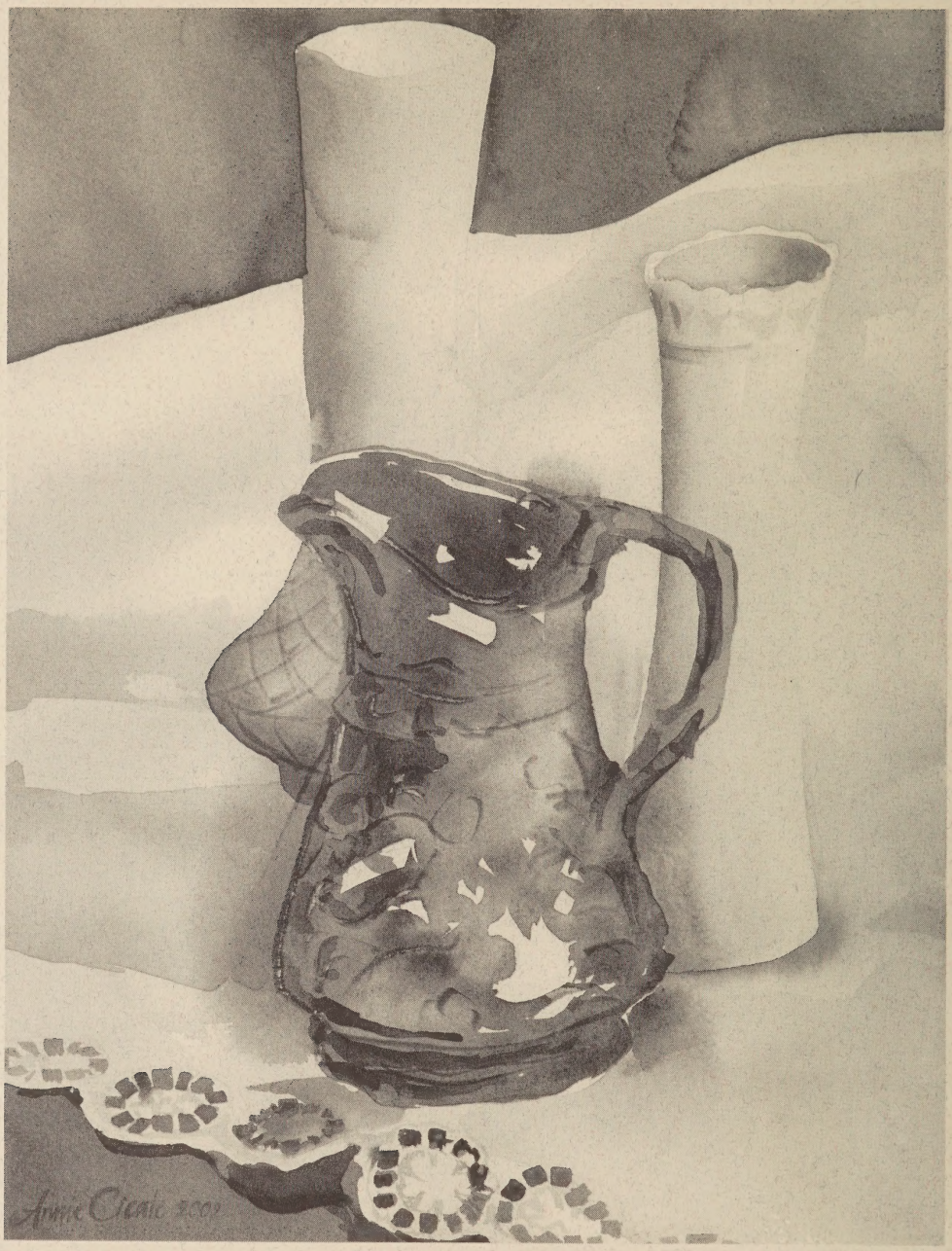
Victoria Press

2003

Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College



Watercolor by Annie Cicale

Victoria Press

Ninth Issue

Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College
Asheville, North Carolina

2003

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Table of Contents

Watercolor by Annie Cicale iv
The Throat Singers of Tuva by Keith Flynn 1
Left Behind by Keith Flynn 2
Watercolor by Annie Cicale 4
Happiness by Keith Flynn 5
Elvis and the Moon by Will Hooper 6
Painting by Fleta Monaghan 13
Firstborn by Will Hooper 14
Uncle Julius by Will Hooper 16
Drawing by Joan Worth 18
Telling Mama by Celia Miles 19
Photo by Joanne Johnston 21
Crow Tales by Nancy Dillingham 22
Drawing by Connie Smutz 22
The Crows Know by Nancy Dillingham 23
Drawing by Connie Smutz 23
After Hog-killing by Nancy Dillingham 24
Drawing by Connie Smutz 24
Granny Woman by Nancy Dillingham 25
Drawing by Connie Smutz 25
In the Valley by Nancy Dillingham 26
In the Fall by Nancy Dillingham 26
Working Tobacco by Nancy Dillingham 26
Quilting by Nancy Dillingham 26
Hoedown by Nancy Dillingham 26
Drawings by Connie Smutz 26
Up the Creek by Barry Landsberg 27
Drawing by Mike O'Kane 29
Bel Canto by Randee Goodstadt 30
Tempus Fugit/Hamlet's Solution by Randee Goodstadt 31
Drawing by Mike O'Kane 31
Drawing by Joan Worth 32
The Inside World of Miss America by Debra Deitering Maddox 33
Painting by Fleta Monaghan 38
The Waters Always Parted for Her by Kenet Adamson 39
Photo by Joanne S. Johnston 39
Image is Everything by Kenet Adamson 40
Photo by Joanne S. Johnston 40

Painting by Fleta Monaghan 41
In Search of Perfection by Joanne S. Johnston 42
Photo by Joanne S. Johnston 43
Drawing by Joan Worth 44
Things I Say to Myself While Teaching by Kenet Adamson 45
Garden Creek by Julia Nunnally Duncan 46
Photo by Lee Sokol 47
Photo by Lee Sokol 48
Auction by Joyce E. Dover 49
Drawing by Joan Worth 50
Greensboro Days by Dara Llewellyn 51
Painting by Fleta Monaghan 51
A Winter Cleanse by Dara Llewellyn 52
Drawing by Mike O'Kane 52
Watercolor by Annie Cicale 53
Bearing the Load by Michael McCarthy 54
Photo by Eugene Pressley 55
Watercolor by Annie Cicale 56
Power's Out by Joanne S. Johnston 57
Untitled by Mike O'Kane 58
Photo by Jim Hornaday 58
Photo by Eugene Pressley 59
Loss by Richard J. De Luca 59
Getting By on Less by Joanne S. Johnston 60
Drawing by Joan Worth 61
Drawing by Joan Worth 62
The Greyhound by Gabrielle M. Thompson 63
Drawing by Mike O'Kane 67
Play Day by Joanne S. Johnston 68
Drawing by Mike O'Kane 68
Painting by Fleta Monaghan 69
Notes on Contributors 70
Drawing by Joan Worth 72

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Watercolor by Annie Cicale

The Throat Singers of Tuva

Keith Flynn

Stupefied
And rolling down
The steep raves
I write
The Constitution
Of no authority
The history
Of ecstasy
Like the waves
Endlessly battered
Buttressed
From behind
By formlessness
And ahead
The only
Jagged choice
Is to carve
Themselves
Against the rock
And in doing so
Shape their
Opposite
Into the shore
And to speak
Of this woe
In thunderous
Tones

Like the blind
Throat singers
Their voicebox
Three notes
Locked between
Siberia and
The Gobi Desert
Breathing out
Rhomboids
And rain dances
Like turtledoves
In a drought
Making misty
The wobbly triangle
Of overwhelming
Fragrances
Coming from
The hidden source
No reference
To the Captain
No map
To chart
The ascent
More native
Than the Indian
More Indian
Than the sea

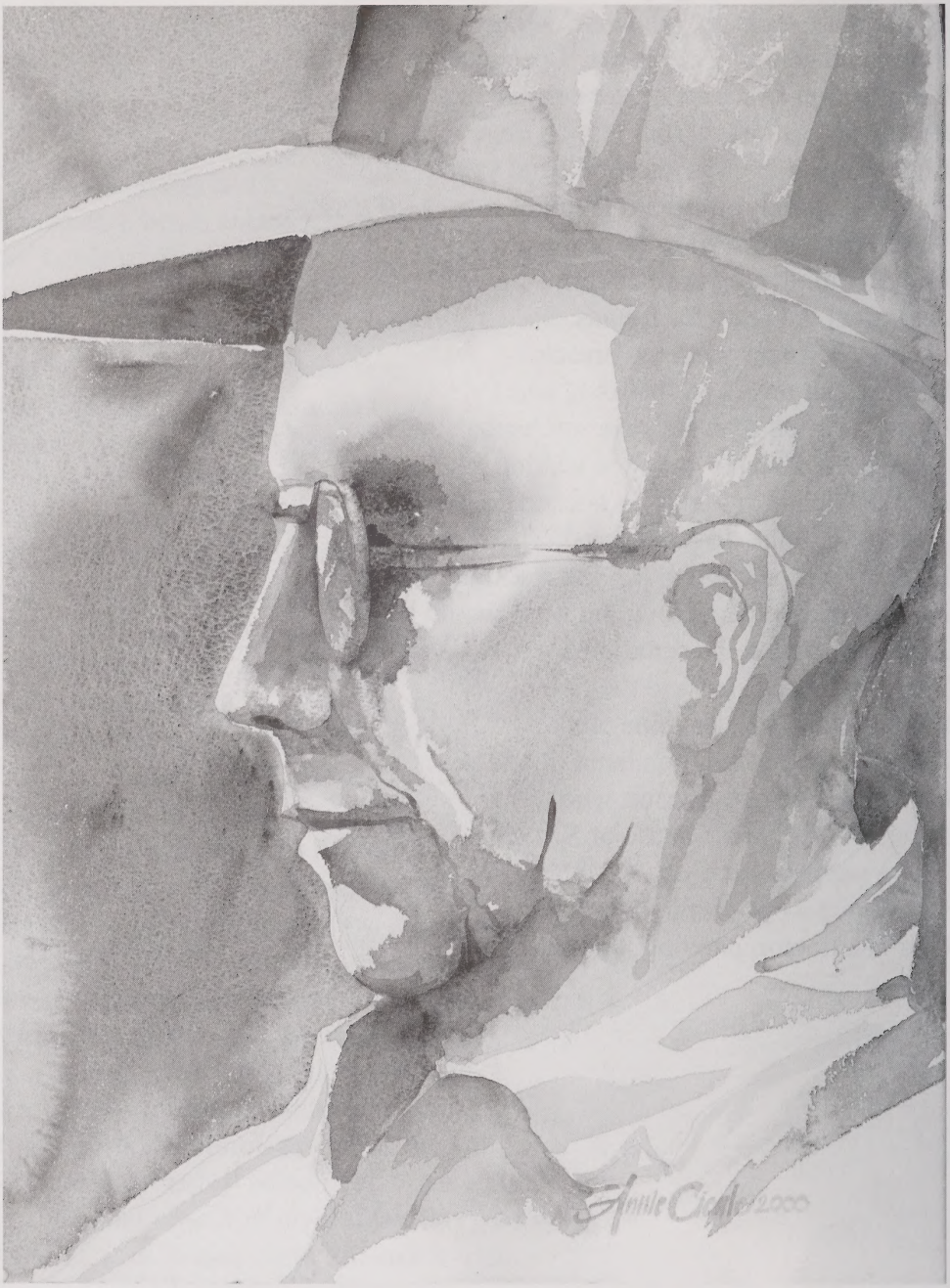
Left Behind

Keith Flynn

12-24-99

This jejune Jesuit and myself,
Pure joist, a beam balanced beneath
Our bottle of Scotch, warm in my throat
As we share conversation and a limo
From LaGuardia to the snowy West Side.
God is barely alive, he confesses,
And time is short, but Scotch is
Better than Port. I don't know,
I answer, I'm a whisky man myself,
But if forced to simile I would state
Unequivocally that God is a tractor
And the rapture a myth in the way
Of his corn. Yes, he says, Jesus
Was to mortal woman born,
Homeless and naked as a thief,
Stealing what little warmth the animals
Provided. I'm divided, I admit,
Staring behind the joint that I've lit
Through the smoke to the harbor
And its horn, ramming Manhattan with snow.
Those that read the Bible know, my friend
Continues, that the signposts point
Toward a glorious end, earthquakes and
Hurricanes, pestilence, the Earth a shrike
Of a house, waiting to explode. Ah but
Not before he calls the faithful home,
Right? I ask. Not until, the minister gloats,
Not until the earthly vessels float to meet
The King on high. I'm nigh to floating
As well, with twenty more minutes to ride,
Trapped in a limo with a minister
From Memphis and feeling left behind.
The poor are easy targets, I decide,
For they will never ride in chariots

Or drink cognac from a golden chalice;
So to pray for the mighty to fall
Is, all in all, their only defense. I sense
In my companion a rumbling, a personal
Recollection from one of the prominent
People he has known, but instead he moans,
Light-headed from my second hand smoke,
And says simply; the devil is no joke.
Well what's the devil to do at the century's
End, except to sing the scarecrow blues
And trawl the alley for friends.
I'll pray for your soul, the preacher
Replies, but this is my building and I
Must say good-bye. He gave my hand
A long warm shake and then waiting
For the silence to break; I knocked on the
Window and the driver stopped. The Jesuit
Rocked, then stumbled, leaving tracks in the snow,
And I wondered how long the wind would blow,
And I realized at the same time
That I'd been stiffed and the fare
From the airport was mine alone.
I laughed and toked, pondered my Xmas
Gift, serenaded by a Jesuit who
Needed a lift, a half-bottle of Scotch
And a warning for a tip. The black
Car ripped a trail through the lights.
God is a tractor, plowing long into the night.



Watercolor by Annie Cicale

Happiness

Keith Flynn

Happiness is
A matter
Of luck,
Perhaps effete,
Fraught with
Mechanical
Holy hazards
And unequivocal
Visions, hunched
And holding
Their head
To the side
As if insulted
That you came
This way
So far so fast,
Fueled by
Ignorance,
And they
Offer this
Teary theory:
No one
Pleased
Knows when
His hour
May come,
Crickets
Sizzling
Happily.

Elvis and the Moon

Will Hooper

The preacher was about one-third of the way into his sermon when I decided to slip out the front door. It had been another steamy summer day, and the little Baptist church still held the heat within its walls. Most of the women had made fans of their Sunday morning bulletins and were stirring up quite a breeze where I was sitting. I knew the sun was setting, and I felt a great thirst for those final rays.

I stepped out into the churchyard and watched the sunset. Beyond the lake past the gravel dirt road, the sun beamed between trees like a glowing red ember that had been thrown into the midst of the forest. The grass was still wet from a thunderstorm that had passed through a few hours earlier, and the air was cooler than I expected, but not as cool as I would've liked.

I felt sudden relief in the evening air as I realized that I could stay outside as long as I wished and therefore would not have to stand and sing (or stand and not sing) the benediction hymn, nor would I have to stand with my eyes closed while Preacher Calvert reeled off one of his ten-minute marathon "End of Service" prayers. I knew the prayers weren't really that long. But quite often it seemed he had more to say in that last prayer than he had said in his entire sermon.

Something seemed terribly oppressive about Preacher Calvert's Sunday night services. In fact, his sermons seemed to follow the mood of the time of day in which they were conceived. On Sunday morning, everything was bright and new. There was a fresh beginning for everyone, and Jesus loved us all, without exception. Even the lowliest criminals were just a prayer away from forgiveness and acceptance. God was good, as was the world he created and maintained for us.

But by Sunday night, boy! Had things fallen downhill. The end of the world was in sight and God was getting ready to cast judgment on his poor little wretched adversaries. I could just see all those fear-filled faces: Hitler, Caesar, Stalin, secular humanists of all breeds, my second-grade school teacher (I liked to think); all of them weeping and gnashing their teeth as God rained plagues down on them with no hope of relief. God, what a dismal world that day had sunk into by nightfall.

I used to imagine that Preacher Calvert, for some reason, always experienced some depressing event on Sunday afternoons. Or perhaps, as the end of day approached, he would think of all the wrongs that had been

done to him in his life and take solace in the vision of God showering vengeance upon those who had brought pain into his otherwise peaceful existence.

Then there were those hymns. They would tell me what a pathetic and sinful slob I was and how I should double over in guilt at the altar, offering my pitiful pleas for forgiveness and begging for God's mercy.

When I was eight years old, I believed the hymns and the sermons. But as I approached the summer of 1975, my fourteenth, I started thinking that perhaps I wasn't really all that bad a guy. And I began to let some of the guilt slip away, at least the guilt that resided on the surface of my being. As this new self-respect slowly crystallized within me, I grew more impatient with what I was being told to believe about myself and found it increasingly difficult to listen to Preacher Calvert's Sunday-night sermons. So I developed a habit of taking strolls around the churchyard after Bible study.

On this particular evening, a full moon was rising in the east and the sky still held a few random white chunks of cloud left in the wake of the storm. Some of the clouds spanned that part of the sky where they were reddened by the remaining rays of the sun. The big white moon sat surrounded by darker clouds that still trembled with lightning, while a stark blue sky circled the moon like a barrier protecting it from those deadly clouds. When the moon was that big and white, it reminded me of one of my mother's buttermilk biscuits, like the ones we'd had that day for dinner, only the moon was a lot whiter.

In search of a better view of the moon, I stepped around to the eastern side of the church. Upon reaching my favorite Sunday-night hiding spot, a set of concrete steps that lead up to a side entrance into the church, I found my seat was already occupied by five-year-old Dennis Stroud. He and his mother had been coming to our church for six months. His father, Ronald, never came; but his mother always requested prayer for Ronald on Sunday mornings. Everybody knew Ronald was an alcoholic. I figured he didn't come to church for that reason. If a fairly well-behaved fourteen-year-old like me could be made to feel guilty as sin, I could just imagine how bad it would be for a person with a bona fide sin like alcoholism.

I guess, in a way, Dennis and I had that in common. Because my father was an alcoholic too. He only did it part-time, though. He'd take long breaks from his alcoholism to be responsible for a while. Then, when he'd start to think about things, like that he was married, or that he wasn't too young anymore, he'd start drinking again. While he was drinking, he wouldn't come to church, because he said that the Bible clearly states that

hypocrites make God sick to his stomach, and our church already had enough hypocrites in it to make God puke. So he didn't want to add to the problem. From my own father's tendencies, and the fact that Ronald never came to church, I figured that Ronald was probably always drunk.

"Hey, Denny," (he preferred to be called Denny). "What're you doin' out here?"

"I told Mama I was goin' to the bathroom. But I didn't wanta go back in."

I knew how he felt. I walked up the steps and sat down on the cool concrete beside him. "See you found my favorite sittin' spot. Nice view from here, ain't it?"

"Yeah. I was just lookin' at those clouds. There's still lightnin' in 'em."

I looked at the distant orange-red clouds, as silent sheets of light flickered and flashed within them. They still held a bold and dangerous appearance, as the white, red and dark parts of them were very well defined and separated. I imagined that, somewhere east of us, and under those clouds, someone was at that moment experiencing the very same storm, and we could see how pretty it was now that we weren't covered in rain and wind.

"What is lightnin' anyway? Mama says she don't really know what it is, but that she always heard it's the lightnin' that hurts things, not the thunder. She thinks it's like fire in the sky."

Kids were always asking me questions like this. I think I must have seemed like someone who knew about scientific things. And if I didn't know, I could usually come up with something that sounded pretty good. Actually, I had read some scientific books, and I liked to read the encyclopedia from time to time. So I could usually come up with an answer that had some semblance of truth in it.

"Well, Denny, I think it has something to do with electricity. You heard that story 'bout how Benjamin Franklin got shocked while he was flyin' a kite in a thunderstorm, didn't you?" He nodded yes. "Well, I think what happens is that, during the day, all the heat causes the clouds to spin around and rub up against each other. And the friction o' them clouds rubbin' together is what causes all 'at electricity. You know, like when you walk across carpet on the floor, and then you get shocked. That's 'cause of the friction between your shoes and the carpet."

"Oh," he said, in a way that I could tell he didn't quite understand my explanation. "Well, what is electricity? I got shocked one time and it felt like I was being shook around inside."

I could see this was going to be one of those conversations that one gets into with kids sometimes. Every time you explain something, they take it one step further by asking you to explain your explanation. I figured it was preferable to what was going on inside the church.

"Uh, well, that's kind of a complicated subject, Denny. It has to do with electrons." I said "electrons" in a slow and intimidating way, wrinkling my brow slightly, hoping to scare him onto another subject, because I really didn't know that much about electrons. It didn't work.

"Oh yeah; we learned about electrons in science class at school. They go around an atom, right?"

"Yeah, right; so you already know about electrons. So I won't explain 'em to you."

"But they're supposed to be real small, so small you can't see 'em. How can they cause all 'at lightnin' like 'at?"

"Well, Denny, ya see, everything that there is in the world has a whole lotta atoms in it, and so everything also has a whole lotta electrons. Now when you got that many electrons floatin' around, somethin' big and terrible is bound to happen."

"Oh,'"he said, seeming a little more comfortable with my explanation this time.

We sat quietly for a few minutes. The sun had gone completely down during our conversation, and the previously red clouds had become a dull gray. Storm clouds still flashed silently in the eastern distance. As the clouds became less interesting to look at, the moon, which had risen significantly above them by now, had increased in intensity.

"What is the moon made of, James?"

I had just read an article about the moon a few days before, so I felt more confident on our new subject. "The moon is what they call a satellite. That means it goes around the Earth, just like an electron goes around an atom. It's just a buncha rock. You know, like they brought back on them Apollo missions."

"How old is it?"

"Oh, I was readin' the other day that it's about as old as the Earth is. 'Bout three or four billion years."

"How much is a billion?"

"A billion is a thousand times a million. So it's been here a heck of a long time. Longer than me or you have, for sure."

"Has it been here longer than my mama and daddy?"

"Yes, it has."

"Has it been here longer than President Ford?"

"Yes, Denny; it's been here a lot longer than that."

Denny seemed surprised at the idea that something could have been around longer than an old person like President Ford. Then he started to grin, as though he were challenged to come up with someone older than the moon.

"What about Jesus? It couldn't have been here before Jesus, could it?"

"Of course it was, Denny. Don't you remember that part of the Bible where Jesus talks about the moon turning red in the last days 'n all? How could he'a talked about the moon like 'at if it wasn't around? Nobody would'a known what the heck he was talkin' about."

"Oh yeah, 'at's right."

Then this deadly serious look came across Denny's face, as though he were about to ask the most profound and blasphemous question of his life.

"Is it older than.....E...l...v...i...s?" drawing "Elvis" out slowly, almost whispering the question.

"Yes, Denny; it's even older than Elvis."

Denny slowly turned his head toward the moon. His eyes filled with amazement and wonder. I could see he was experiencing the same feeling I felt when I first realized that there was something that had been around so long that I haven't the ability to imagine how old it is; no benchmarks old enough to measure by. So I just accept, in amazement, that it exists in the present, and that it has always been, and always will be here.

We sat there awhile, both of us thinking about time. Denny was thinking about the age of the moon, and I was thinking about the fact that I could remember when one of the last few Elvis movies came out. It was kind of depressing.

Denny began to shift around a little; I could feel another question coming on. "I wonder why God makes things like 'at."

"Things like what?"

"Things like the moon. It's just a big bunch of rocks in the sky, ain't it?"

"Yeah, as far as I know it is. Though God, he may have some purpose for it that we don't know about. Or maybe he just wants to give us something to study, seein' as how he made us the studyin' kind, you know."

"But why would he give us something and then not tell us about it, but just make us try and figure it out? Ain't that mean?"

"Well, Denny, one time I heard this sayin'. It went somethin' like life is a candle, and the dream gives it flame; you understand that?"

His five-year-old face looked as thoughtful as it possibly could for a moment. Then he carefully said, "You mean that people like to study things they don't know about, even if God already knows about them?"

"Yeah, sure. Don't you like to look around and figure things out sometimes? Like when you're playin' outside. You see somethin' strange and you try and figure it out."

"You mean like the other day when I was tryin' to see what was inside of a bird nest in a tree in our frontyard?"

"Yeah. Only adults like to figure out harder stuff than that. Like the moon, or electrons, or somethin'."

"Oh." He sat quiet for a moment. "Is that what scientists do?"

"Yeah, that's it. They just try 'n figure out why things are the way they are."

We sat quiet again for a little while. Away from the bright light of the moon, a few stars became visible. The ground was enmeshed by a sporadic network of firefly light, their quiet and illuminated messages slowly sparkling in a chaotic and graceful dance several feet above the ground. A bat was frantically chasing moths around the silvery white night light across the gravel parking lot.

Denny got restless. He got up and walked down the steps. He looked down for a moment at the gravel beneath his feet, then reached down and picked up a handful of rocks. He studied them a moment, rolling them around in his palm. He looked at the different colors, shapes, and sizes: brown dirt, mixed silver, gray and white granite, smoky quartz, and tiny pebbles so small their colors couldn't be distinguished. Then he looked up at the moon. "Just a buncha rocks?" he asked.

"Yeah. But that don't mean there's nothin' to it, though." I affirmed. "Why, you'd be surprised at the things you can figure out from rocks." Denny looked down at his handful of rocks again. "People who study rocks—geologists, they're called—they can figure out by testin' them rocks what they're made of, how old they are, and how they got made that way. And from that, they can tell how old the Earth is and how it got here. Yeah, there's a lot of things you can learn from rocks."

Denny looked perplexed for a moment. "You said the world was four billion years old. Is 'at older than six thousand years?"

"Yep."

"My mama told me that the world is six thousand years old 'cause 'at's how old the Bible says it is."

I felt on shaky ground right then. So I figured I'd better be either very tactful, or completely incomprehensible. "Well, I guess if God can know four billion years, he can know six thousand. It's all too long for me to know anyway." Denny looked confused, which was good because I realized that I was telling Denny things better left unsaid around our church.

Denny shook off the perplexed look and replaced it with a mischievous one. "Hey, watch this, James!" He ran underneath the night light and began to throw the rocks from his hand, one at a time, in front of the bat. The bat flipped around and flew jerkily towards Denny's decoys, being misled from its true course to chase phantom insects. After Denny emptied his hand of rocks, he got bored and stepped back across the parking lot and up the steps to sit down beside me again.

Then they came out. They had all heard the Word of God and were ready to face another three days in the world, until Wednesday night called them back to the Word once again.

"There you are!" said Denny's mother, Grace Stroud, as she rounded the corner of the church and headed down the sidewalk toward the steps beneath us. "You know, I was beginnin' to wonder where you got to."

I figured that I should speak up. "He's been here the whole time, Mrs. Stroud. He hasn't been in any trouble at all."

"Well, I don't like him runnin' out on church like that. Like to keep 'm in my sight. But thank you, James, for lookin' out for him. C'mon, now, Denny; we gotta get home. Say bye to James."

"Bye, James; talk to ya later." Denny jumped off the steps—they weren't too high—and ran after his mother as she walked toward their car.

"See ya, Denny." I saw my mother coming toward me. She was becoming a little worried with my new habit of stepping out of church during the sermon. The people who usually did this were those men in the church who smoked, sneaking out to have a cigarette. She was beginning to wonder if I had developed some sort of smoking habit.

"What are you doin' out here, boy?" she said, trying to fill her face with a disciplinary look, but accomplishing only a look of motherly worry instead.

"Oh, nothin'. Me 'n Denny were just talkin'. It was gettin' too hot inside the church for both of us."

I got up and accompanied her across the parking lot toward the car.

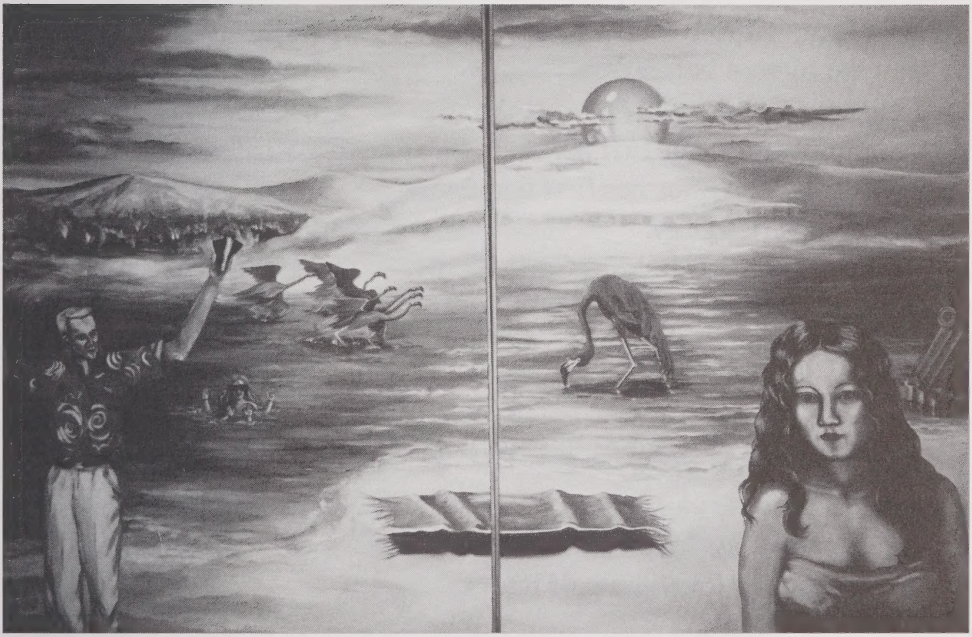
"Talkin' 'bout what?"

"Oh, you know; the moon, lightnin', stuff like 'at. He was askin' me kid questions. Though some of 'em I couldn't answer too good."

"I remember you askin' me questions I couldn't answer too good either," she said amidst a little laugh.

Preacher Calvert was shaking hands at the doorway of the church as the congregation came out. As I looked toward the entrance he waved goodbye and I returned the gesture. I glanced up and saw the white church steeple in the silver light pointing up like a sign post towards the stars.

We both got in the car. As we pulled out of the driveway, I could hear the gravel spraying up under the car, some rocks being thrown away while others were driven ever more firmly into the ground.



The Seventh Day
Painting by Fleta Monaghan

Firstborn

Will Hooper

I saw Mama puttin' away
the boxed pictures last night,
but not before she'd looked
at 'em awhile.
I knew which pictures
she was lookin' at—
though I couldn't see
'em myself—
'cause she had the same
look on her face
that she had
when the picture was taken—
that was June 7, 1954—
I'd seen the picture before.
It's a black and white of
Mama holdin' Gary, her first son—
I'm her second son after her first daughter—
we both came after Gary.
In the picture Mama's holdin' Gary
and not smilin' but just
lookin' down at him.
And he ain't lookin' at her 'cause
he's dead.
He was 'bout 24 hours old
when the picture was taken,
if you can call it 'at, 'cause
he'd been dead for 23 and a half hours.
But Mama said she'd
wanted some pictures of him
before they buried him.
So now she's got all these pictures
in 'at yellowed ol' box
that's taped up and in
the den closet most times.
They're different pictures of Mama
holdin' Gary on Grandpa and Grandma's porch—

her lookin' at the camera
and not smilin'—
another her lookin' down at Gary,
another over her shoulder where
you can see Gary's face and
he's wrapped in a white blanket,
and him not smilin'
and his eyes are closed—
but you know he ain't asleep.

One time I asked Mama
why she wanted those pictures
and she said she didn't
wanta forget her firstborn—
but then she said she also
didn't wanta forget how
God punishes fornicators
'cause if God punishes you hard
you'd better remember it.
And I asked her what fornicators are
and she said it's people who have
to do somethin' they ain't ready for.

Sometimes when Daddy's been drinkin'
and is gone somewhere or just asleep
in the bedroom,
she winds up in the den by herself
and lookin' at those pictures again
and sometimes I hear her cryin'
while she's lookin'—
I know she's there
though I don't bother her.

Uncle Julius

Will Hooper

I remember Julius's pipe,
but that ain't the main thing—
And when he sucked in a draw
of singed apple and cherry,
the cup of tobacco
lit up heat red—
and smoke rose slow
to the ceiling like a
flower of cloud
where it convened and conspired
with the dying sunlit dust.

And his smooth and gray
soft wool coat
Decorated with his
Vitalis smell
and brown elbow pads
and five hidden pockets.
I wore it and
I felt like a 45-year-old man too—
and I was proud.

And the watches
and Zippo lighters
in his jewelry store.
And him with
that convex bulb glass eye
peering down into the
miniature world
of ticking mechanical mysteries—
cleansing and curing
diseases of the cogs and springs—
and he'd sit utterly still and hover
over his timeless patient
with minute tweezers
like he too was stopped in time

until again the spring twisted
and the cog clicked.
But that ain't the biggest thing.

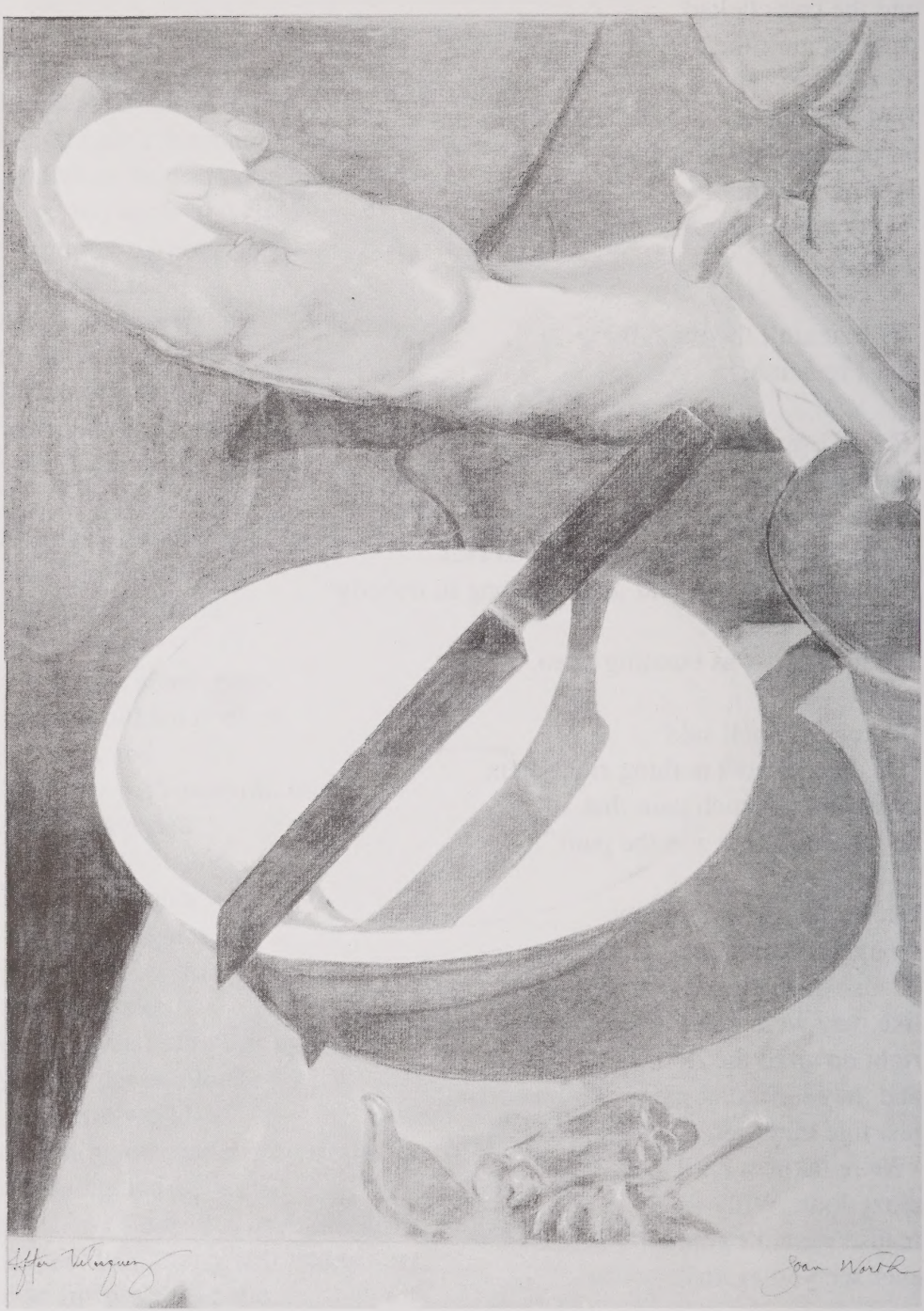
And that big "G"
on the big black cloth
over his coffin.
A brand new Mason,
he was.

But that ain't the main thing
that I remember.

'Cause I remember his eyes—
when I stood before him
and they were looking at me
like they were separate from Julius Hill.
Like they were lost and didn't belong to nobody
no more—
and his heart was bursting open.

Doctor Becknell said
"He didn't know nothing right then;
he was in so much pain that all
he felt and knew was the pain."

But I think his eyes knew,
though his mind did not.
'Cause they were exploding out
like they were gonna drop
right down to the floor—
and they looked at me
just like they were sayin',
"We're takin' a hard and
crazy look, Willy—
'cause we ain't gonna
ever see you again."



Drawing by Joan Worth

Telling Mama

Celia Miles

The deed was done. Well, it would take a year in North Carolina–but the decision was made. One divorce coming up. Relief was my main emotion; the waffling, the do or don't had taken too long. Now my problem was telling my mother. I didn't want to blurt it out over Sunday dinner at her house, didn't want to take a chance and tell her before Sunday dinner. She might throw up her hands and make us pimento cheese sandwiches instead of fried chicken, potato salad, and banana pudding. I didn't want to tell her before her Thursday afternoon driving lesson; any distraction and she'd scare her instructor even more than usual. Friday was a bad day; she was getting a permanent then rather than keeping her usual Wednesday appointment. She'd said, "I don't dare smell up Mr. Weston's car at my lesson." It would be cowardly to wait until after we'd stuffed ourselves at her table, soon-to-be ex-spouse and I, after our leisurely reclining on the porch for a couple of hours of gossip and burps, punctuated with swigs of iced tea.

My mother has a strong sense of honor. She'd think if I was going to divorce her favorite son-in-law, we certainly ought not to continue to sleep in the same house for a few weeks. No matter what she thought, she wouldn't ask if we were going to sleep in the same bed. She'd wonder if she should still call once a day and talk about her garden and the continuing household ailments to soon-to-be ex son-in-law. Could she still ask him to fix that broken window sash and carry those heavy bags of mulching material?

I was not the first in our family to do the deed. My mother's older sister had divorced in the early 1940s when it must have been a real shocker. But then, it was war time and she'd promptly joined the WAC and gone to serve her country, and returned with a new spouse. Our marriage, on the other hand, had survived a long two years past the first decade...and appeared to the family as stable, settled, secure. We didn't drink, fight, swear, run around, or do anything that called for action drastic as divorce. Our problem was not unhappiness exactly but the fatigue that came of concealing unhappiness. I should have acted miserable...that would have made it easier.

"Let's walk along the fence and I'll show you where the moles are digging up those bulbs you planted for us," I said. A slight breeze from the left caused me to change sides so my nostrils didn't close up from the smell

of her permanent wave solution. John was refereeing a high school wrestling match somewhere. I'd picked up my mother at the beauty parlor, inviting her to dinner. I'd put the roast in the oven along with some water in the bottom of the pan and some onions for flavor.

"What's that smell?" she said, stopping to break off some dead iris tops.

"Your new perm?" I was getting my first sentence constructed in my head.

"No, that's not it. Do you like this strawberry-lemon lotion Marie used?"

"It's okay," I replied. We tramped along, stepping on the raised furrows made by some underground creature intent on destruction.

"What a mess," my mother said. "And not a thing you can do about it. Mary Jane has tried everything—traps, poison, newfangled gizmos from that garden shop—and her yard is just a maze. She's going to get Jamie to plow up the whole thing."

"Speaking of a mess," I said. I couldn't get too interested really in destroying the mole population in a backyard that would next season be someone else's problem.

She smiled beatifically. "I've never had a mole anywhere near my yard."

"Mama," I said and watched her stamp her feet on the fresh dirt. She was going to have a time getting those Keds clean. She considered herself much more modern than her neighbor who still wore only black leather shoes, but she wasn't quite modern enough for socks. White Keds and nylon stockings for everyday activities Monday through Saturday; beige pumps for dress-up times and always on Sunday.

"We're getting a divorce," I said. "John and I are getting a divorce."

My mother stopped her stamping. The silence seemed so deep I could hear the moles underfoot scurrying for safety.

"Well, child," she said and that word brought tears to my eyes. "Well, I'll swear."

I looked over her head toward the house, willing the shine in my eyes to recede. Smoke was roiling through the open windows, through the back door.

"Yikes," I said.

"Lordy mercy," she said. We ran toward the house and into the roiling smoke. I started for the telephone in the living room. She had more sense.

"I knew I smelled something," she declared, throwing open the oven door, clicking off the oven. We both started fanning the smoke with dish towels and I cursed the silent smoke alarm. I'd known it didn't work—its little red light had been out for weeks, but I'd ignored it.

"Throw it out," I yelled when she yanked the roast from the oven. Then common sense said, "Can we save it?" The odor of scorched onions and blackened beef actually made that strawberry-lemon permanent wave smell delicious.

"Honey," my mother said as she kicked open the screen door and set the pan on the steps. "Sometimes something's burnt so bad it don't warrant saving."

We eyed the shriveled roast. "Don't even think it," she said. "You might think you can scrape it off and save it, but it's dried up inside."

"Let's get some iced tea, Mama," I said, "and go sit on the front porch. I've got a lot to tell you."

Photo by Joanne Johnston

Nancy Dillingham

excerpts from *First Light*

Drawings by Connie Smutz

Crow Tales

"If you split their tongues, they could talk."
Old Saying

1. Stodgy old men
   in stiff black overcoats
   like undertakers
   line the fence
   facing into the wind

2. Ornamental amid the stubble
   of a snow-whitened field
   the crows sit
   black jewels
   in winter's eye

3. A cacophony of crows
   blackens the sky
   diving, riding the air pockets
   cartwheeling into the currents
   like children, cawtalking

4. A raucous band of thieves
   reconnoitering, decoying
   as one of their own
   slips through an open window
   making way with shiny treasure

   red ribbon trailing

Nancy Dillingham

The Crows Know

In need of respite and rest
she walks the dark-edged woods
wary of the morrow

Startled by the whoosh of wings
she looks up and spies in a tree
a bit of scarlet
wound into a crow's nest

Her mind leaps into memory—
a window opens . . .

her hair down
billowing against the pillow
unadorned yet lit by light

and—just in her sight—
dark-winged sorrow sits
unwinding the long red ribbon of joy

Nancy Dillingham

After Hog-killing

"Rattle your hocks! It's hog-killing time!"

Around Thanksgiving
when the weather gets cold
build a fire
shoot the hog . . .
scald, scrape
dress it—
tenderloin
backbone and ribs
pork chops
shoulders
middlin
ham hocks
salted down
in the smokehouse

Work up sausage
and souse meat
render out the good lard
and the bad
always fry
the sweet meat first
make biscuits and gravy
and crackling bread

Save the bladder
to blow up
like a ball
for the children

Use it all—
(even the slung chitlins)
everything but the squeal

Nancy Dillingham

Granny Woman

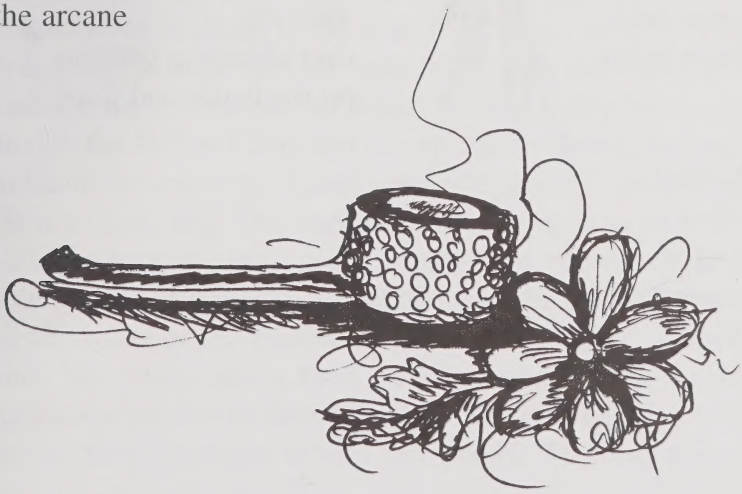
Shrunk like a doll
she lived in her tiny tarpapered shack
surrounded by paling

spent her days
smoking her pipe
lining up neatly on shelves
her bottles for doctoring

In her yard
swept clean
as a floor
except for
small squares of flower gardens
well-kept

she held forth
with anyone
who happened by

hocusing-pocusing
small children
giving off
a hint of the arcane



Nancy Dillingham

In the Valley

Lit by autumnal light
each golden leaf
becomes a star

The day glows
as night

In the Fall

Translucent
in the afternoon light
rain-doused
dogwood leaves
glow golden green
red orange flame
berry-jeweled

Working Tobacco

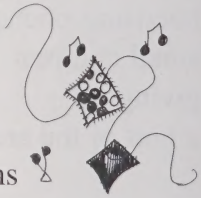
The only sound's
the quick hard talk
her hands make
as they move
down frozen stalks
picking them clean
as bones

and the hollow
metallic click
of flayed stick
upon discarded stick

Quilting

With movements
easy as breathing
she takes up
her pieces
one by one
stitching them
into a mélange
of colored squares
until they fall
into a pattern
mellifluous and seductive
haunting as the harmony
of a church choir
calling

Hoedown



Threaded
by a fiddler's tune
and a caller's commands
hands and feet
lead a conversation
of four
weaving
ever-changing patterns
on the hardwood floor

Up the Creek

Barry Landsberg

Heard the expression "Up the creek without a paddle"? I was there but unfortunately had a paddle. Bob White is a scoutmaster. As in most troops, there is never enough parental participation. To get the additional adults needed for an outing, Bob asks his friends. He paints the outing in soft watercolors, making it sound like a trip to paradise. That was how I got drafted. My head was in the clouds; little did I know my feet would be in the water.

"Barry, I am taking the boys on a canoe trip. How would you like to go? We are starting at Old Forge and finishing at Tupper Lake. It is about eighty miles and will take one week. There will be plenty of time for fishing and swimming." It sounded great. The fact that I had never paddled a canoe did not bother me. All I could think of was large expanses of clear, cool water, with an occasional fish splashing through the flat surface, causing shimmering ripples.

We left about 11:00 PM on a balmy Friday night. By 7:00 AM, after an uneventful drive, the group arrived at Old Forge. Not one to be bothered by such minor things as sleep, Bob immediately began supervising the loading of the five canoes.

There were two people to a canoe, and, besides me and Bob, one other adult. The scouts ranged in ages from eleven through fifteen. I can best describe the scouts by comparing them to the Dead End Kids from the early 1940 movies. They came from a poor, tough neighborhood and would take nothing from anyone except maybe another person's property.

The Indians make canoeing seem very easy, and actually it is. Just remember this: when walking to the front of a canoe, keep both hands on the outer edges for balance; and the man in the back does the steering. With this advice we shoved off and began the first part of out watery journey though the Fulton Chain Lakes. In case, however, any unforeseen tipping problems swamped us, we all wore life jackets. Canoeing, although physical, is not strenuous. The important thing to do is to pace yourself. Unlike rowing, where you must continuously keep at the oars, in canoeing it is possible to drift. By lunchtime we had covered the first three of the eight lakes that make up the Fulton Chain. Bob's painting seemed to be coming true. We carried all the food we would need for the week. Everything except lunch was dehydrated and the menu was varied. It varied, ranging from pancakes to beef Stroganoff. The only thing I can

compare the crackers to would be plasterboard used in construction. It can easily be bitten and chewed into small pieces, but you cannot seem to swallow it.

After a brief gourmet lunch we were back in the water, paddling smoothly. Smoothly, that is, until we ran out of water. Thinking we must have taken a wrong turn, I could not understand why Bob was unloading his canoe and pointing the other canoes to clear landing areas. He answered my question with a matter-of-fact "This is our first portage." "Great," I said. "What the hell is a portage?" To my misfortune, I soon found out. I also discovered why I would probably never go on another canoe trip. A portage, it seems, is when a canoeist runs out of water and must transport his canoe and all equipment via land to the next body of water. This transportation, it should be added, is accomplished by footsore, back-breaking, lung-gasping power. Our portages (there were to be five) would range from a short quarter mile to a heart-rending mile and a half. While carrying my backpack of about 80 pounds on the first trip of the portage, the realization suddenly hit me, with the impact of a torpedo, that I would have to make this walk four more times. As a matter of fact, the quarter-mile portage suddenly became an excruciating mile-and-a-quarter trek. The canoes came in two different sizes. Three were fifteen feet in length and two were seventeen feet. Bob was able to carry one canoe and the seven scouts carried two canoes. That left the other adult, Jim, and me to carry the two seventeen-foot canoes. At the start of the portage the canoe weighed only 100 pounds, but at the end it felt like 500 pounds of aluminum anchor on each shoulder. Through trial and metal-denting error, we learned the best way to carry the canoe was upside down resting the edge of the canoe on our poorly padded shoulders. When at long last all our equipment was at the next lake, Bob calmly told us we still had two lakes to paddle before pitching camp.

I now know what drove the men on the Bounty to mutiny. Except for the fact that my weary arms would not move, I would have belayed Bob with an oar. Everyone reaches the limit of his endurance, but how do you explain that to a scout age eleven when the trip has just begun? The remainder of the week did not get better. Each day dragged by the same way. I dragged my weary legs on a portage. Each portage had its own unique peculiarity. One that seemed to be a dirt country road had the last 300 feet under knee-deep mud before we could put the canoes in the water. The mud delayed us long enough to feed the mosquitoes and black flies common to the area. Never one to look on the gloomy side of things, Bob told us we would not have to worry about leeches.

As with pleasure cruises, even slave ships reach their destination and the journey finally ends. While not my most memorable vacation, the trip is forever scrimshawed in my memory. Even today, if someone mentions portage, I can feel the heavy rims of the canoe on my shoulders and my knees begin to buckle.

Drawing by Mike O'Kane

Bel Canto

Randee Goodstadt

Means beautiful singing.
Refers to 19th century arias
Also Ann Patchett's wonderful book
About

Love which transcends speech

And

The power of beauty to elevate us.

Improbable relationships made
Possible by odd circumstance:

Hostage and terrorist,
Wealthy and poor,
Educated and illiterate,
Powerful and oppressed,
Performer and audience.

Ah, how a human mind can create such a story!
And my gratefulness to be another human being,
Who can wrap herself warmly, absorbed completely
In the characters and the tale.

Lost in the book.
And somehow, a little bit transformed
By the healing power of art.

Tempus Fugit/Hamlet's Solution

Randee Goodstadt

Time is flying, but where does it go?
How does it change itself so?

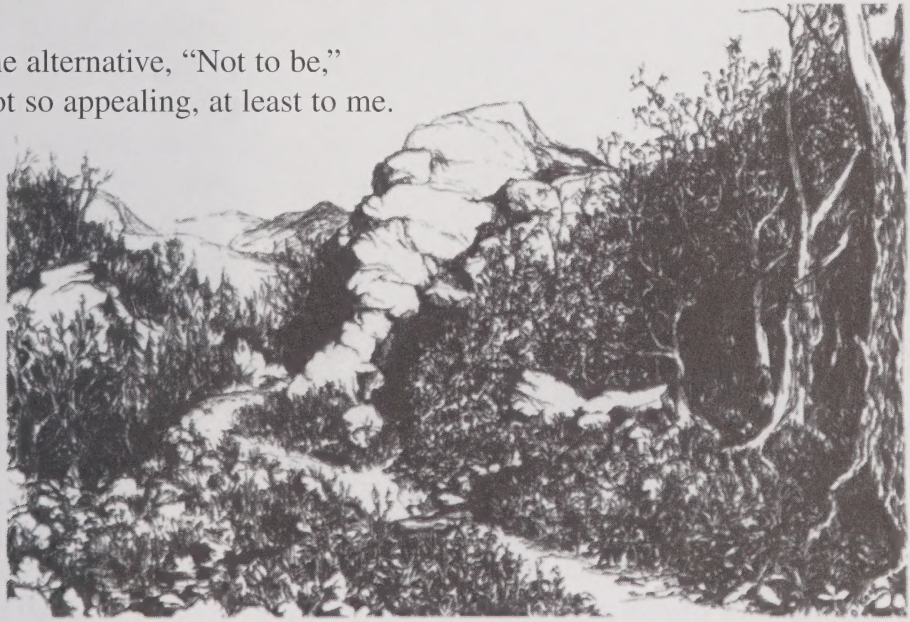
(To crow's feet around my eyes
Heaviness in my thighs
Wrinkles on my face
Increasing lack of grace.)

But let's not forget the rest:
Time also makes one best!
As wisdom sure increases
And misery decreases.

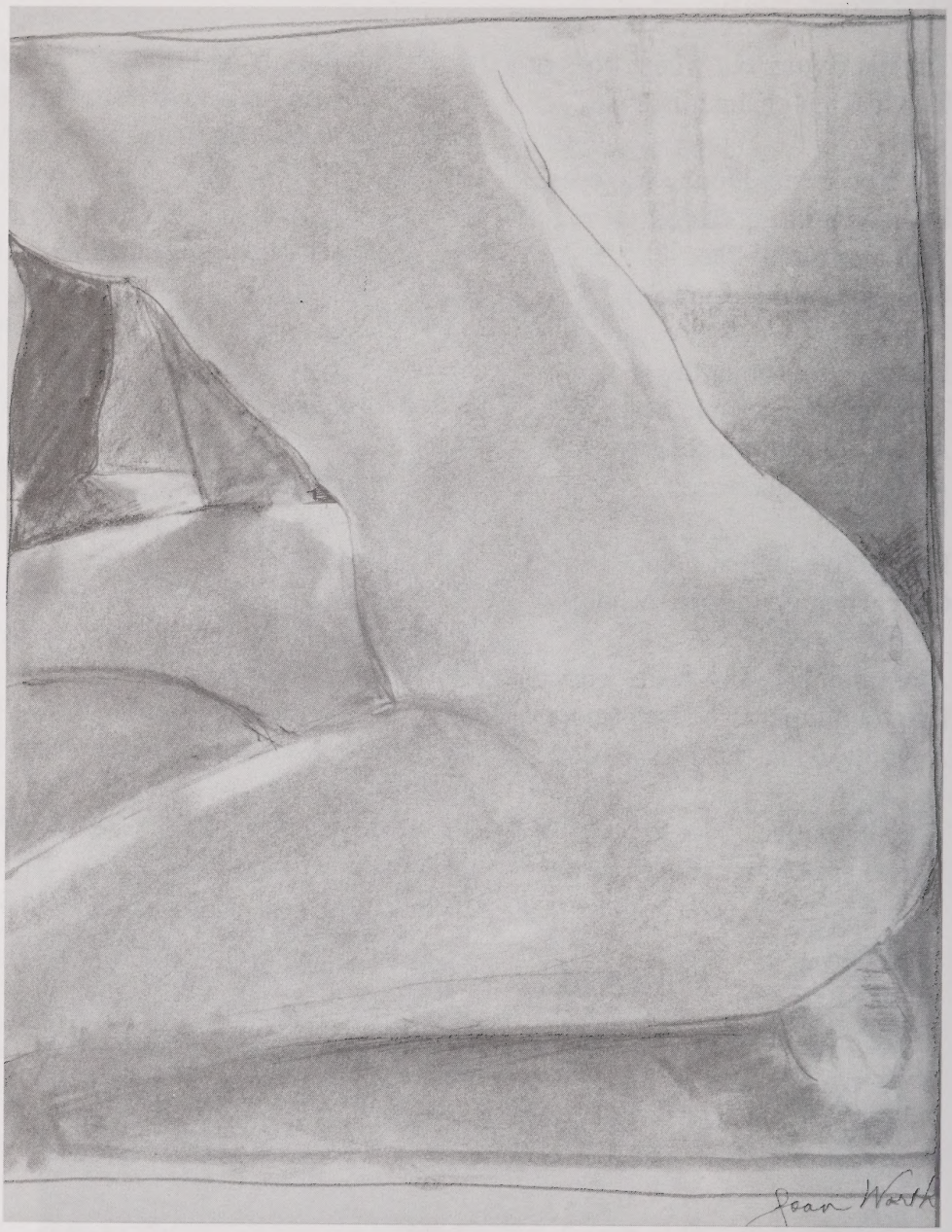
Perspective a great help
Over when you were a whelp.

And time, they say, heals wounds
I've found that to be true (more or less!)
Anyhow, what else can we do?

The alternative, "Not to be,"
Not so appealing, at least to me.



Drawing by Mike O'Kane



Drawing by Joan Worth

The Inside World of Miss America

Debra Deitering Maddox, Miss Iowa 1984

A part of the America landscape for 76 years, its theme song is one of three tunes most recognizable to Americans. It's the only program Tricia and Julie Nixon were allowed to stay up late and watch, and tens of millions of Americans will tune in every September to view the tradition, fairy tale and pressure cooker that make up the Miss America Pageant.

But there's far more to Miss America than just the television event. Its year-long preparation involves more than 300,000 volunteers producing 3,000 local and state pageants showcasing 80,000 contestants. A vast network of "pageant people" across the country proudly call themselves the Miss America Family, keeping each other informed on which up-and-coming contestants possess "The Look" needed to become "Miss A."

There's even a Miss America Sorority—Mu Alpha Sigma—replete with sorority pin. Toss in 12,700,000 television viewers, a multi-million-dollar business and there's Miss America. Sprinkle in a few ulcers, a flood of tears, and a bevy of backdoor politics, and that's Miss America, too.

For me, the Miss America Pageant is more than an annual television event. For four years it was a major part of my life as I wound my way through the Iowa pageant system, eventually representing the state in the 1985 contest. I still watch the pageant, but with a more practiced, cynical eye born of experience and hindsight.

Like all Miss America aspirants, I had first to win a local pageant—which is patterned after the national contest with interview, evening gown, talent and swimsuit competitions. I eventually won the local title of Miss Southwest Iowa; this local pageant then sponsored me at the Miss Iowa level. I received a scholarship, wardrobe allowance and all-expense-paid trip to the state contest. State representatives receive the same awards for the Miss America competition held each September in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

At Miss America

At the national contest, we contestants were welcomed into pure unadulterated chaos, a disruptive media circus. Following publicity of sexually explicit photographs, Vanessa Williams had prematurely relinquished her crown seven weeks before and the pageant was temporarily without a queen. There had been no crisis-management plan and the Miss America Pageant was blindly feeling its way through

unprecedented territory. The press was all over the controversy and here we were, 51 hopeful girls, arriving on the scene to prepare for a live production and dream come true.

Ceaseless activity makes Miss America an endurance test in high heels. Eighteen-hour days filled with events, appearances and rehearsals—always thinking, doing, acting and looking your best. The rehearsal fashion parade advertised the economic inequities between the states. Miss Texas wore $100,000 in diamonds; Miss North Dakota confided that her state was barely able to pay her airfare to the pageant.

My feet swelled two sizes. Even my hair got tired—of being curled, sprayed, pinned, pulled and teased. Big hair. Emotional and physical fatigue set in; facades cracked. And through it all, I could not shake an overwhelming sensation of hurtling along destiny's highway toward an unknown destination. Incessant activity offered no opportunity to regroup and gain objectivity.

I looked fate straight in nine pairs of judges' eyes. These human beings, these mere mortals, came before me with hidden biases and agendas. I stood before them full of hope, dreams and wishes as only the young can possess. They would decide my fate, these people I did not know.

If chosen Miss America, my life would forever be changed. I'd go places, meet people, experience worlds otherwise not open to me. Where I lived, my chosen profession, whom I married could ultimately be affected by those nine people sitting in front of me. I'd never felt so vulnerable. Virtual strangers playing God with my life. It was something I thought about often.

Saturday. The longest wait of all began with a 5 a.m. alarm. All contestants were sequestered at Convention Hall by 7 a.m. Telephone calls were not allowed; radios were confiscated; no one but contestants and production people were permitted inside the building. More rehearsals. Interminable waiting. Cut from contact with the outside world, the secret of the Top 10 was secured until the 10:10 evening production. Mine was not one of the coveted ten names called out that evening.

Being Miss America

Miss America is crowned; the TV cameras turned off. Miss America attends her first press conference as contestants pack up and empty the dressing room before heading for the Miss America Ball. Scholarships are awarded, food eaten, dances danced, goodbyes said. Miss

America, her family, chaperone, and others sit within a decorated gazebo pavilion.

Finally—after two bone-wearying, stress-filled weeks of 15-hour days—the place shuts down. The Miss America experience is over. It's 2 a.m. or later. The new Miss America will get three hours of sleep before preparing for her scheduled early-morning beach photography session. A New York press conference is held in the afternoon, followed by a shopping spree to choose her wardrobe for the year. A round of early morning news shows will follow early Monday morning. The hectic year has begun.

It has been said that the two loneliest people in the country are the President of the United States and Miss America. A young woman no more than 24 years of age, Miss America travels 20,000 miles a month, settling in a different hotel room each night, surrounded always by a constantly changing sea of strange faces except for her ever-present chaperone.

The appearance schedule set before she's even crowned, Miss America gets only two weeks off during her year's reign. There is little privacy, little personal time, a need to always look, act, and be her best. It's an unnatural pressure that has caused many an unpublicized Miss America ulcer.

The upside is that, during her reign, Miss America will meet numerous celebrities, dignitaries and politicos and will have entrée to Hollywood parties, the Super Bowl, Macy's Thanksgiving Parade and various television shows. She will earn $200,000 (in addition to her $50,000 scholarship) and have increased career opportunities, earning potential and doors open to her upon completion of her reign.

The Propaganda Machine

As in most things, there are two sides to every picture. And no matter what else it may be—scholarship pageant, beauty contest, American tradition, career launchpad—the Miss America Pageant is, in fact, a large propaganda machine—an organization fraught with the mines of politics, secrets and big business agendas that make up a secret world behind the crown of Miss America.

A world that doesn't talk of the anorexia or bulimia, the contestant depression that too many times follows a disappointing finish, the unawarded prizes, hidden rehearsal cameras, the misperceptions purposely perpetuated. But then, Miss America is a business dependent on image, public interest and public perception. It may be a nonprofit organization,

but it spells out big bucks for a slew of industries: hotels, souvenirs, consultants, fashion, make-up, hair, etc.

The Secrets Behind the Crown

Miss America emphasizes its status as a scholarship pageant, ever mindful that it is the largest source of academic scholarships for women in the country, awarding $32 million in scholarships each year. Although technically true, some of this $32 million includes tuition scholarships given by colleges to title holders only if they attend that university.

Most times a contestant is already pursuing a degree at another institution, and the scholarship goes unused, its value becoming part of the collective $32 million pot. Sometimes the award is extended from an out-of-state university, making the use of it even more improbable.

Perceiving Miss America as a scholarship pageant seems most ironic when examining some of the educational track records of its main spokeswoman, icon, and symbol, Miss America:

- Marjorie Vincent, Miss America 1991, was four hours shy of receiving her law degree from Duke University upon winning the title. She never returned to school, choosing instead to pursue a television reporting position in Meridian, Mississippi.
- Although Carolyn Sapp's (Miss America 1992) platform was education, she has yet to finish her Bachelor's degree and, at last word, was not attending college.
- Leanza Cornett, Miss America 1993, also never completed her undergraduate degree, but headed to Hollywood for a short stint on Entertainment Tonight. She continues to appear periodically on television programs.
- Miss America 1995, Heather Whitestone, hit the motivational speaking circuit and got married, never returning to college to finish her undergraduate degree.
- Shawntel Smith, Miss America 1996, is still on the motivational speaking circuit and has not yet returned to graduate school.
- The recent retiring Miss America, Tara Holland, was in her second year of graduate school when crowned. Her immediate plans are to continue touring as a motivational speaker and singer.

That's a lot of Miss Americas with no college degrees—in a program purporting to exist in order to bring women additional scholarship

opportunities. Miss America's $50,000 scholarship is paid directly to her educational institution. If she doesn't return, the scholarship goes unused.

Can Anyone Be Miss America?

They'd like you to think so. The reality:

- In the 77-year history of the pageant, a handful of states have never made the Top Ten and 24 states have never had a Miss America. Money makes the difference. Some states have big budgets for the best possible coaching for make-up, modeling, interviewing, and fitness training. Custom-made clothing is created by top-notch designers. Yes, these big-budgeted states consistently do better at Miss America.
- "...fairest of the fair, your idea, all-American face and form...." Words describing Miss America, certainly the most qualified, best all-around contestant. Not necessarily so. In their most unguarded moments, pageant insiders concede that Miss America chooses an image it wants portrayed, looking for the contestant best fitting that role. Sometimes it's beauty, perhaps it's brains, could be time for a Horatio Alger story. For the contestant, it's a crap shoot, and all you can do is your best for peace of mind.
- Every year, Non-Finalist Talent Awards are awarded according to the contestants' preliminary talent scores. This year three vocalists, two ballet dancers, two pianists, two dramatic monologues and a baton twirler were so honored. On the surface, it would appear that a young woman possessing any type of talent could have a shot at the title. But when scrutinized, these numbers don't add up to a mathematically representative sample. Of the 51 contestants, 58 percent sang vocal selections, 22 percent performed some type of dance routine, 16 percent played piano, and 4 percent gave a dramatic monologue. Seven of the Top 10 semifinalists sang, and six of the past seven winning Miss Americas performed vocal selections. Non-Finalist Talent Award winners just don't match up. And they don't ... year after year. They're disproportionate to the total universe. Why is that? Regardless, the perception given the masses is that anyone can be Miss America.

In all fairness, I cannot deny what the Miss America Pageant system has done for me; I would not be the person I am today. It demanded my best as a student, athlete, musician and person. It offered up the challenge and forum to self-actualize, enabling me to reach my potential at that

particular stage of my life. I discovered unknown abilities and talents that have been subsequently fostered, enjoyed and utilized. For that, I give appropriate credit.

Yet, years of experience and hindsight have also enlightened me to the special introduction Miss America gave me to big business, image, politics and corporate hidden agendas. I'd intuitively known and felt things circulating around me, but lacked the experience and wisdom to put together the pieces.

When I encountered these elements again in the business world, I began to understand my Miss America experience with greater clarity—and deeper sadness. I was forced to concede that nothing is sacred anymore, not even Miss America, and that perhaps its pristine ideals exist only in the starry eyes of youth not yet grown up enough to know any better.

Illusion
Painting by Fleta Monaghan

The Waters Always Parted for Her

Kenet Adamson

"If you think clothes don't make a difference,
try walking down the street without any."

She twirls
And sun-bleached, blond
Butt-length hair swirls.
Blowing a kiss to her
Buff, blond, boyfriend,
We watch her
Watch us
Watch her
Fashion ensemble:
Black platform Ecco shoes,
Virgin Dolce & Gabbana slacks,
Pink Gap blouse,
Black A&F sweater.
She glides back
And forth
Before the runway.
The SAS jet lands.
A Gauloise cigarette
Burns, Sony headphones
Hang, Ericsson cell phone
Plays a Culture Club tune.
The Louis Vuitton luggage
Arrives. Boyfriend two, swarthy,
and smarmy,
Enters to pick up
Her bags.

Image is Everything

Kenet Adamson

Emergency Flotation Device
Drunken patchwork quilt.
Patterns of plains, plants and cities.
Far below my seat.

Gettin' the Paper
Sons and I skip
Crunching walnut shells. Springer
Spaniel chasing squirrels.

At a Redlight Overlooking I-240 and the Exxon Station
A shaggy head rests
Hanging out of the car
Window looking backwards. Smoke bawls
Out of the tailpipe and window.
His mother sucks on a
Virginia Slim, and coughs as
The car drives on.

Class Dis-
Missed
Students smoke and lounge
Languidly around the birch tree deck.
Vacated cicada shells.

The Lovesick Maiden
She makes love to it.
Sucking a cigarette deep,
fingertips and lips.

Counterbalance
Painting by Fleta Monaghan

In Search of Perfection

Joanne S. Johnston

On an early fall morn, 'twas a natural thing to do—
going in pursuit of a perfect rose.

Bushes high from a summer's growth
gave evidence of care from spray;
and because of the pruner's shears,
new growth appeared.

Along the way, I looked and sniffed
past Prominent, Crimson Glory,
Peace, Chrysler Imperial, Tropicana,
Love, Double Delight, and more
whose names escape me now.

Beauty so prevalent but with flaws
here and there.
Past its prime.
Dark with mildew
or age spots
Too small.

Amid countless blooms,
the perfect rose
rested on Mr. Lincoln's bush.

I stopped in awe
to take in its beauty
which stood noticeably
above all the others.

Soon I knew
if this visit had come at noonday,
this rose, too, would have been passed over.

And remembered again how easy
it is to discount
and dismiss
what was beautiful
in pursuit of what is beautiful
without realizing how quickly
the fading begins.

Photo by Joanne S. Johnston

Drawing by Joan Worth

Things I Say to Myself While Teaching

Kenet Adamson

"Open your books to Shelley's poem "Ozymandias."
You'll notice his style ..."
Does this outfit make me look fat?
It's just like watching bobble-headed student dolls in the rear window of my class.
Their heads bounce and their brains boing.
I need to remember to schedule my car's inspection.
This is my best material. What do they expect. Aren't they zombies today?
It doesn't get better than this.
And why does that boy keep putting his hand up his shirt and rubbing his nipples?
"...Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert..."
I'd better hike up my fat pants.
They're too tight.
I need to skip lunch.
Bob's not here.
How many mothers has he had die this semester?
Oh goody. Angel is finally here. I can start over again.
"We're on page 9."
"No you didn't miss a thing last Friday. We just sat around and mourned your absence."
I need some chocolate.
Why did Tammi have to bring in a Cinnibon sweet roll?
The smell is killing me.
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty and despair!"
At least Brandy is being oh so subtle
about sending messages to Cliché over her cell phone.
At least I can count on Sarah on not being disruptive.
She doesn't snore, so that helps.
"Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away."
"Remember to read the rest of the story and be prepared to discuss it on Wednesday.
I expect you to show more interest and involvement and not just daydream.
Except for Sarah who is actually dreaming."

Garden Creek

Julia Nunnally Duncan

The water held no more than rocks
and an occasional rusted hubcap that
washed from the filling station on the
other side of the creek bank.
The water was shallow and usually clear,
but dingy at times with silt.
Its fragrance was not of galax or pine
or other pungent or sweet smells
of mountain brooks;
all one smelled was the fumes of gasoline
from nearby pumps
or exhaust from cars on the highway.
Yet those days I sat content on the footbridge
that crossed my grandmother's creek
at the edge of her backyard—
a bridge made of two shaved logs and hand-sawed boards,
with rotted holes big enough for a dog's leg to get
trapped in or a child's foot;
a bridge made by my grandfather Matt,
long dead and known to me only
in pictures stored in a frayed Victorian album
or in an ornate framed portrait,
both hidden upstairs in a darkened room.
Those days I sat with a bamboo pole,
a line and maybe a safety pin for a hook,
the hook lightly carried downstream in the current.
I was patient, waiting for a fish that would never bite,
encouraged by sight of
an occasional salamander or frog.
A short walk away ran the muddy waters
of the Catawba River,
in its depths all the mud turtles, snakes,
catfish and carp

a seasoned fisherman might hate or hope to see,
one weary from the cotton mill
or carpentry job,
stealing some time,
leaning over the riverbank with Camel cigarette in mouth,
spinning rod in hand.
But on those warm summer days
in the 1960's
I preferred the quiet waters of Garden Creek,
my grandmother in the house
sitting in front of the black and white Zenith
watching *Video Village* hosted by Monty Hall—
her favorite show—
and I, alone, sitting on the bridge,
pole in hand, sneaking a look across the highway
towards the gently sloping street
where my parents, brother, dog, and I lived,
waiting for a fish to bite
and three-thirty to arrive
so my father would come
to take me home.

Photo by Lee Sokol

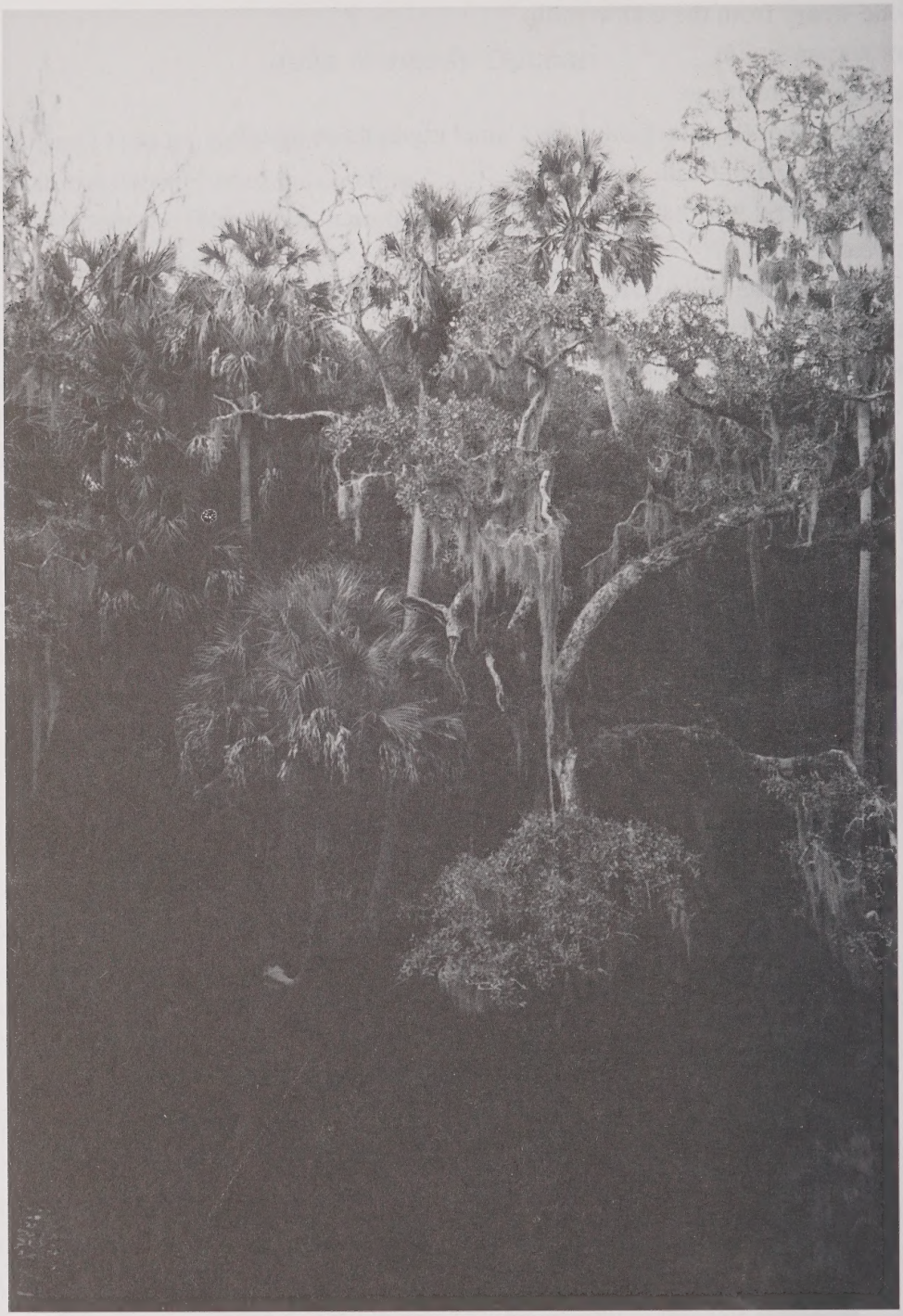


Photo by Lee Sokol

Auction

Joyce E. Dover

The day I received an invitation to the estate auction of the late Etrulia Briggs, I felt ecstatic and grateful John remembered me. His mother, a dear friend and a lady, taught me to realize the importance of doing one productive thing every day of my life. She set that example. The one thing that she never learned to do was to play her Wurlitzer grand piano but I, often, was invited to play for her. I always dreamed of owning a piano of such grandeur, but never did I think that I would own this beautiful piece of furniture.

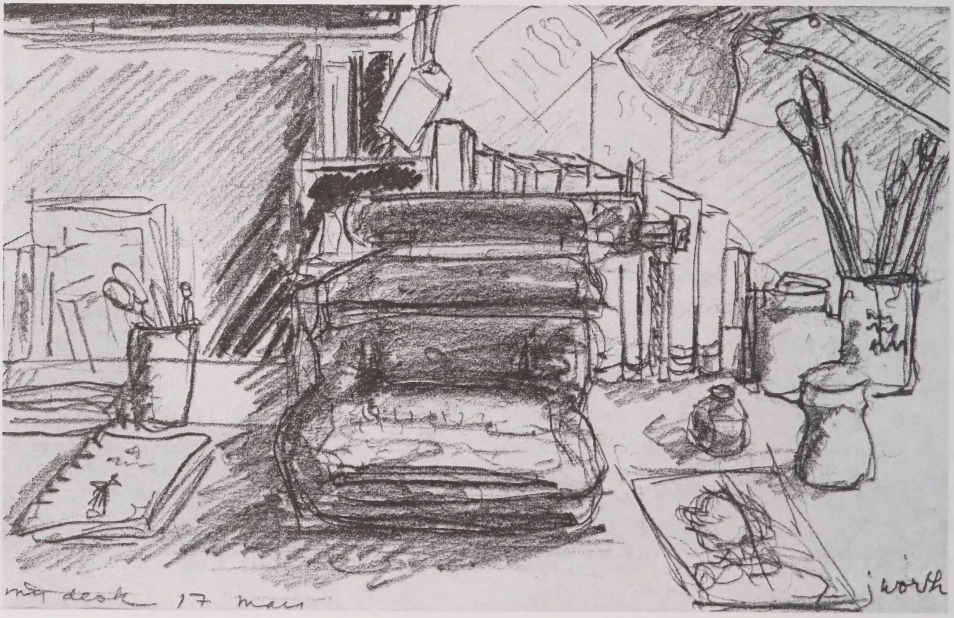
John extended the invitation to a preview of the items the day before the auction. I drove to Winston-Salem, North Carolina, on Friday, May 16, 1997. My emotions were mixed as I approached the big two-story brick house. A part of me was filled with the excitement of a long-time desire of owning this elegant piano; yet, I was saddened because I knew of Mrs. Briggs' hope that her family would treasure and keep her beloved possessions and, eventually, pass them down to the younger generation. This wish would go unfulfilled.

I saw many beautiful china pieces that Mrs. Briggs had hand painted. There were tall vases with peacocks in vibrant blues and greens. There were plates of every size and each was painted with various flowers, fruits, and birds. She painted roses in every color and each rose was different. It would have been hard for me to choose a favorite, as they were all beautiful. John gave me a plate that was ornately framed that Mrs. Briggs had painted. It was a basket of American Beauty red roses and white baby's breath. I was also given a couple of vases that were originals of her artistry.

There were clusters of grapes made of buckeyes that Mrs. Briggs had wired together. She carved wooden rhododendron knots into chickens, birds, and insects. The most painstaking piece of art that I saw her make was a lady-bug crafted from a grape seed and fine black thread. There were items that she made from rocks, cones, seashells, weeds, and even dollhouse furniture made from tin cans, for which I had the winning bid.

On the warm, sunny day of the auction, the yard filled with people. There were antique dealers, curiosity seekers, and then people like me, who had a personal interest in this lady's artwork and furniture. Her furniture was antique and some of the pieces had been set in the yard because the house would have been too small to accommodate the number of people who had arrived for this big event. The piano that I had gone to buy was in the house. I really didn't think that I would ever be able to afford this prized piece so I was careful in bidding on the other pieces, fearful that I would over-spend my budget.

Finally, the time came for the sale of the piano. I was praying that if it was God's will, I would be the high bidder. Several people who were interested in the piano went into the living room of the house. I stood there scanning the room, analyzing everybody's face, wondering how much money they would spend. The bidding opened at $5,000; then the real torture began. As quickly as I could call out a hundred more, one of the other rivals would just knock my bid down. I thought, "Why don't they quit?" As I got weaker and more anxious, the bidding came down to me and one other lady. She looked like someone who came from *The Little House on the Prairie*. I will never forget her straw hat, turned up with a sunflower attached, and her yellow print dress. I was feeling weaker by the moment so I tried to stare at her confidently to let her know that I was going to have that piano regardless of the cost. What she didn't know was I was right on the verge of throwing in the towel because I was nearly to my limit. I would be the high bidder—then the auctioneer would say, "Going, Going, now folks, you know that this piano is a real quality piece." Then the little lady would again call out another hundred dollars. I was beginning to dislike the auctioneer because he was taking too much time and using his experienced sales pitches to get my rival to bid again. When the auctioneer finally said, "Going, Going, Gone," and pointed to me and yelled "Sold to Number One," I just stood there and cried. I could not believe that I had just become the owner of a 61-year-old cherry French provincial grand piano and the bench with a needlepoint pad of red roses against a black background, the piano that Mrs. Briggs had repeatedly asked me to play. Her favorite was *Beautiful Dreamer* and to this day, I still play her song.



Drawing by Joan Worth

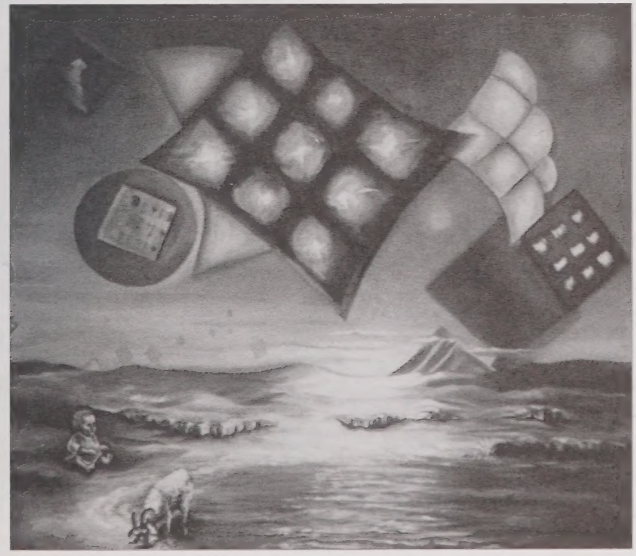
Greensboro Days

Dara Llewellyn

I've walked these streets before,
Uncertain then with youth,
lithe with hope
traveling avenues of knowledge
around campus and into my mind.

The homes on West Market look the same
but Cedar Street is gone.
The companions I traveled with—
scattered across the land.
We were brave once, caring,
free of boundaries, daring,
waltzing the night away,
drunk on life and champagne.

I waltz on occasion now,
less certain with age,
less lithe with hope,
treading streets less safe,
still dancing free and unfettered.



What Reeve Saw
Painting by Fleta Monaghan

A Winter Cleanse

Dara Llewellyn

I delight in the scouring winds of winter,
howling out of the North,
whipping barren chestnut limbs,
smashing dead poplar branches to the ground,

ripping out tattered cobwebs,
slashing away weeds and debris.
removing the detritus of seasons past,

Essential form is left,
brimming with sap—soon to rise,
dancing in a wintry ballet.

Drawing by Mike O'Kane

Drawing by Annie Cicale

Bearing the Load

To the Victims of the World Trade Center
September 11, 2001

Michael McCarthy

"It will be more than any of us can bear."
New York City Mayor Rudolf Giuliani

We saw you.
At windows, framed by terror,
We saw you.
We saw walls come crashing down,
Load-bearing walls.

We saw, and our eyes ached.
We saw,
And our eyes couldn't bear it.
Like Oedipus,
We wished we had not eyes to see.

Builders speak of load-bearing walls.
Your load-bearing walls
Could not withstand the hatred-heat.
Like your walls,
We could not bear it.
We knelt to lay down the burden,
And kneeling, were given strength.

Dust darkened a city,
The dust of hearts and hopes ground to powder.
Dust drifted over a city,
Dachau-dust,
Fresh ashes, from a fresh hatred-burn.
Ash-dust of our countrymen.
Dust which gave testimony,
Eloquent in soft silence,
Testimony to the sad impotence of self-nursed hatreds,
Which cannot create, only destroy.

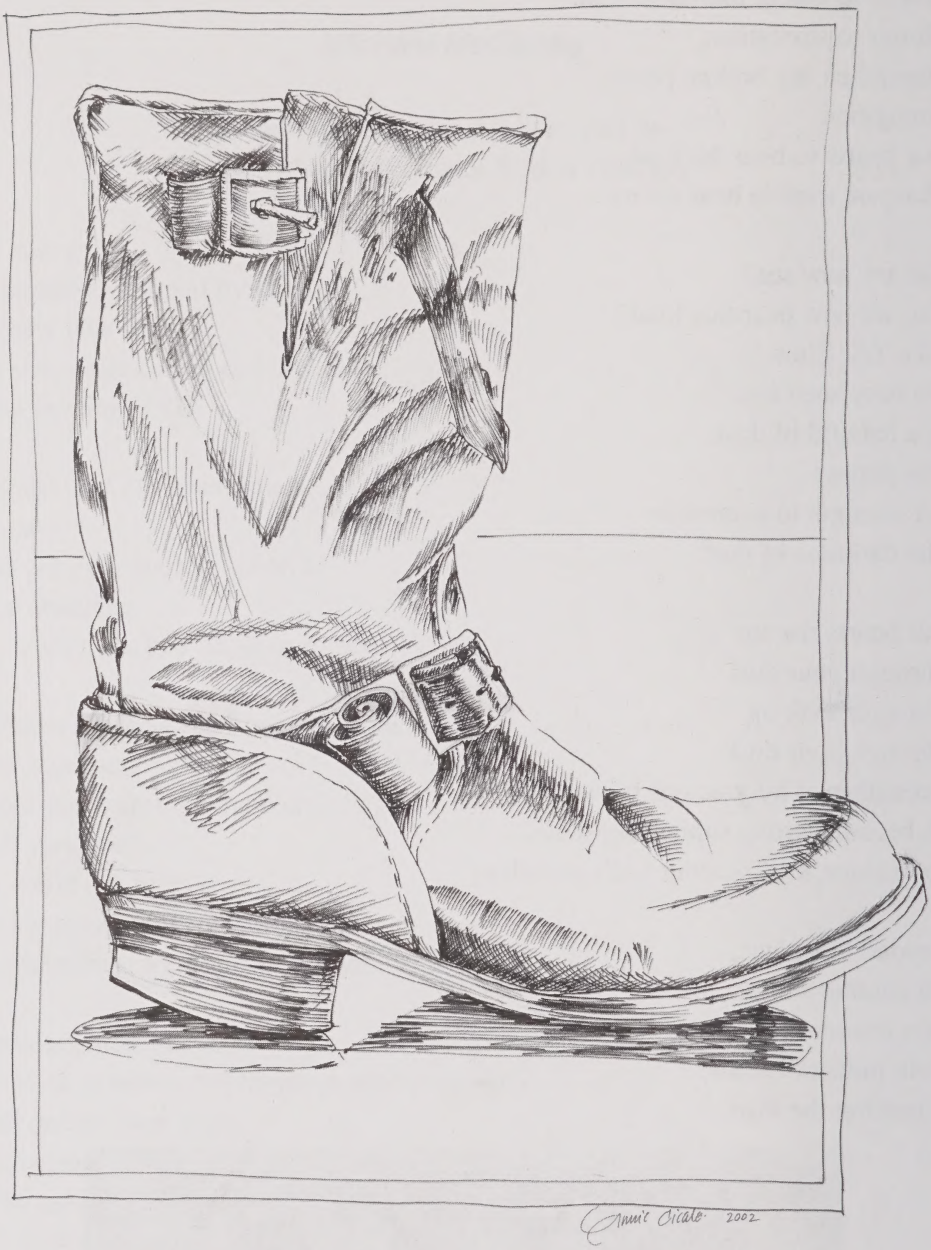
"The world breaks everyone," Hemingway said,
"And afterward, some are stronger at the broken places."
Your dust became our spiritual mortar.
Mortar to mend, mortar to heal,
Mortar to strengthen,
Strengthen our broken places,
Strengthen
Our hearts to bear the load,
That you tried to bear for us.

Can we now see?
Can we now bear this load?
Like T.S. Eliot,
We have seen fear
In a handful of dust.
Our prayer:
For strength to overcome
The darkness of dust.

Our hearts rise up
Through your dust.
Our eyes look up
Through your dust,
Strengthened by you, our heroes,
To become strong supporting souls,
To become load-bearing walls ourselves.

Beyond this place,
On another shore,
Two towers rise up,
Twin pillars of souls,
…bearing the load.

Photo by Eugene Pressley



Drawing by Annie Cicale

Power's Out

Joanne S. Johnston

'Twas a sneaky wind that challenged the limb to stay in its place on the oak tree.
Without knowing the rules of the game, the limb was "in" only to be "off"—off into the abyss below.
Toward its final destination, the limb bobbed back and forth and visited the utility
company's investment strung from here to there in the vast expanse of sky.
With a thwack and a spark and a thud, both found a new resting place off the tourists' road.

Power's out!
Urban life changes quick as a spark can fly and a limb can fall.

City slickers struggle in houses accustomed to warmth on a winter's day as chill down comes,
and huddling is re-discovered to ward off the cold.

Urban cowboys ride their pickups to the corner 7-Eleven for artificial logs to burn in make-believe fireplaces.
Roughing it means that city farmers bully cans of ravioli with hand-held can openers.

Fixing food means warming something on a wood stove or over the open fire
While gourmet soup and scrambled eggs lend credibility to the menu.
VCRs don't work and television is useless.
Hair goes unwashed when a plug-in nets no hot air for drying.

Bath time is delayed
as hot water heaters refuse to do their usual task
And chill bumps are in style.

Bed time comes early as dark
Under blankets like pioneers with enough cover designed to keep bodies still
so the cold doesn't matter so much.

Conversation is as strange as the shadows on the wall,
But Quietness needs a break now and then.

Oh Man, for all thy sophistication in a modern world,
How quickly is humility visited upon thee.

Untitled

Mike O'Kane

Black faces appear in the classes that I teach
Sometimes one, sometimes two in each course
And all too often then, they quietly disappear again
In a silent retreat, no discussion or explanation. Just gone
In some way so fragile that they barely touch the experience
Before they leave, like shadows...
Unwilling to be exposed under such predominantly white light. Where every move
Becomes an indicator of a different race. Where stereotype becomes self-fulfilling
Self-sabotage, self-scrutiny, self-judgement.

I feel the pain of witnessing a wrongness.
We all have some knowledge of the quiet abandonment of dreams.
Of internal cycling scripts and stories that close down possibilities.
Instead of opening them. Your loss is all of our loss.

How can this pressure be released? How might you feel welcome?
What kind of safety and permission do you need
To bring your true and undiluted self into these rooms?
What does your spirit wish to hear? What keys can turn these locks?
What doors open from my side in this so utterly divided house?

Photo by Jim Hornaday

Photo by Eugene Pressley

Loss

Richard J. De Luca

inevitable consequence of life
wraps me in its ebony wings
its heart drumming my name,
I swallow my tears,
steel myself,
yet
see through winter's glass
back-lit, black-lit arrows
cawing across the sky
to pierce my soul
once more.

Getting By on Less

Joanne S. Johnston

In business, it's called "downsizing," but families and individuals can do it as well. Within a period of two months, I came to the point of wanting to downsize in my personal life. Perhaps it came because I had a birthday, spent six weeks in China, or simply realized I had too much of the world's goods. Whatever the reason, I became ready to strip my life down to fewer possessions and greater simplicity.

Getting to this point didn't happen all at once, of course. My family went through the cycle of going from apartment living to a small house and then to a larger house in a nice neighborhood in a small town. We loved where we lived at each place along the way.

Being in a big house for twenty years was not only a joy, but also a privilege. I have always known how blessed I was and have tried never to take my bounty for granted. However, it became evident that four of the seven rooms in our house were rarely used. That left three in regular demand, plus the bathrooms and garage. It was evident we could live in half of our space and still be satisfied.

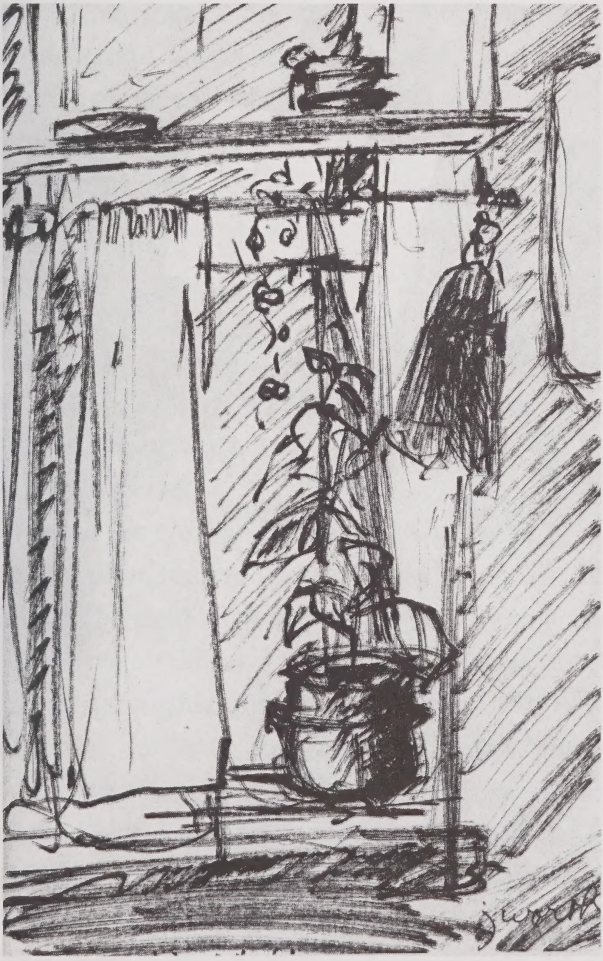
Perhaps satisfaction is the key to it all. At different times in my life, it seemed to take more to provide satisfaction; however, I have turned a corner in my life and find that I can be and am satisfied with less rather than more.

Having possessions brings responsibility, which can become burdensome. Attending to, maintaining, protecting, and upgrading possessions can be a full-time task. Things beget things. It isn't enough just to get a pair of shoes. One needs slacks and a top to match. Or a new piece of furniture seems out of place without a complete re-doing of the surroundings. In America, we have been programmed to think that more is better and I am convinced that at times in my life, more has been better. But not now. Things are different and my list of things to want is shorter than it has ever been. Most of what I want now is intangible and speaks to the heart.

I have a sixty-seven-year-old friend who said she would hate to die and make it necessary for her children to go through all the stuff she and

her husband have accumulated. I feel that way too. Things are only special because of the emotion and memories we attach to them. Probably, if we came to the heart of matters, a box full (different-size box for different people, of course!) of "treasures" would be about the right amount. The value of many things has long passed; and when I look at some things I have, I'm not sure why I kept them. Makes me think I could get along nicely without them.

Readiness is an important concept along the way of life's journey. My readiness is to get on with downsizing for myself. If I do it, I will be responsible as a steward of all that I have been given. I need to do it; and now, I want to do it.



Drawing by Joan Worth

Drawing by Joan Worth

The Greyhound

Gabrielle M. Thompson

Morning slammed in on the back of a hangover like a greyhound exploding from the gate of the seventh race determined to expend every ounce of its strength and win the day. Josh moved quickly from the bed, knowing there were only seconds until one end or the other erupted. With one fluid motion he dropped his boxers with his left hand (the only thing he ever slept in, having become accustomed to them on Mara-Lynn's insistence that sleeping raw was unseemly once Christy began to toddle) and grabbed the trash can to his chest with his right as his buttocks claimed the worn plastic seat. As he emptied his stomach of the previous evening's debauchery, his unfiltered Camels sat beside his Bic on the sink counter which was scarred by numerous earlier cousins left to smolder. He knew better than to light one; the gagging would begin even before his stomach could discern if this morning's dog of a hangover rated a full-fledged set of heaves. His normal "loose bowels" began their serenade as he tried to recall what day it was—a work day, or could he go back to bed and sleep this one off? Then he remembered. Not a work day—today he was flying from Los Angeles to Asheville to see Christy in her new home, with her new husband, her new practice, and her new belly—a family reunion with the only family he had other than the dogs at the track.

Josh had never been east of the Mississippi; a fifth-generation Californian, he'd taken his wife and child in their tiny trailer through the surrounding states on their vacation jaunts. The desert and sea were his haunts and, occasionally, the Sierra Nevada. Mara-Lynn's mother had been from North Carolina, but she'd escaped after the general textile strike of 1934 when her father and brothers had been shot in Burlington. She had hitched a ride west with the labor boss when it all blew apart, realizing her chances of ever again working in the state were next to nil. By the time they had reached the Pacific, Mary Beth was engaged to Roland Goldman. Mara-Lynn was her third, last, and late child—the name a salute to Mary Beth's Southern roots, yet pronounced like the hottest film star of the silver screen. Mara-Lynn grew to be a blonde bombshell with the same innocent quality of her namesake, but was happy with her lot in life as Josh's wife.

They'd met on the Sunset Strip, she in a Thunderbird, a graduation gift from her parents, and he in a Volkswagen van equipped with a bed in back and sunroof overhead. When they eloped to Vegas they sold the Thunderbird, using the money as a stash to keep them traveling in the van, enjoying the next sunset, the next lovemaking, the next joint. Mara-Lynn's family had disowned her, even her two older brothers whom she'd believed would understand. Josh and Mara-Lynn had lived in a commune in Monterey for a while, but the lifestyle finally had gotten old when Mara-Lynn discovered she was pregnant. Sleeping in the van, using the community outhouse, being cooped up during a full week of rain, nothing had dampened her spirits until she began to crave milk during her third month of pregnancy and the "elders" told her it wasn't affordable or allowed by their standard of vegetarianism—grains and greens were all she needed and would be allowed. Josh had fired up the van that night under cover of darkness, glad that they'd kept secret their emergency bankroll for just such a contingency.

Josh made it to the airport in the midst of a dreary gray rain, breaking a sweat from the combination of the exertion and the alcohol still coursing through his body as he carted his heavy bag in from the parking lot van. Not the worst hangover ever, but bad enough that he kicked himself for tying one on the night before. It was fear that made him do so—the fear that he needed to be on good behavior for the next week. Still, he brought his own gin in the suitcase, not wanting to have to ask Christy to take him to the store to buy liquor nor wanting her to know how much he drank. Once he checked the bag and got his gate pass, Josh headed for the hair of the dog, his first Bloody Mary of the day. His color and sense of well-being returned after the third.

As the plane lifted off over Los Angeles, Josh looked out the window at a city filled with noise: incessant car horns, engine revs, blasting stereos, pulsating sirens, airplanes, trains, sheriffs' helicopters, alarms, gunshots, and wall-to-wall screaming humanity. Christy's letters seduced with stories of her home on twenty acres far from town out Route 9, with bears, turkey, and deer being their most regular visitors, and stars so thick it looked as if the sky was carpeted. Josh couldn't imagine such a paradise. Christina had decided on Chapel Hill for law school, having graduated UCLA in the top of her class on full scholarship. By then, Mara-Lynn's

cancer had run the course of her body from breast to bone; however, she would not allow Josh to tell Christina, insisting she must go on with her life and not be burdened. Josh understood that Christy's choice of North Carolina was her way of paying homage to her mother's roots. Mary Beth's Southern heritage had passed down through the females of the line and her Southern drawl echoed in Mara-Lynn's occasional choice of phrase. Now that Christy had finished her law degree and settled in the South, her occasional telephone call reflected the slower pace of enunciation and tendency to voice more syllables than a Westerner would. Josh hadn't seen Christy since the day he put her on the plane for Chapel Hill. She'd finished law school and eloped the next week, marrying in Venice at St. Giorgios, gliding afterward by gondola to the Gritti Palace to experience a honeymoon straight from *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*. Afterward, she had explained on the telephone that his family was Southern, wealthy, and would never have understood her not having a clan to invite to a big church wedding. Brent, her husband, who worshiped the ground she walked on, offered her Italy as an out and she grabbed it, knowing Josh's feelings wouldn't be hurt since he'd chosen to elope with her mother when they began their life together. What she didn't say, but he fathomed, was that Mara-Lynn's death and her will calling for cremation without a funeral (which happened two months before Christy's graduation) had probably weighed heavily in his daughter's decision. He had followed his wife's wishes and lost them both.

Neither the flight's food nor its movie was worth the effort, but Josh subjected himself to both for lack of anything better to do. He wasn't a reader, as Mara-Lynn had been. He thought that was part of his problem; he had nothing to do since she was gone. He was so bloody bored with television; yet night after night he sat on the tired sofa in his apartment with a gin rocks and watched how low America had sunk in the realm of entertainment. It wasn't safe to go for a walk at night in his current neighborhood; besides it was noisy and dirty and his whole hope was just to escape all of that for a while. He'd lost the house and everything they'd owned to the medical bills—experimental bone marrow transplants—not that he begrudged a penny; he'd have given his life to save Mara-Lynn. Two more Bloody Marys on the plane allowed his exhaustion to catch him and sleep grabbed hold of him before the movie finished. His dreams were of

Christy: her anger, his remorse. It was based in the time before her pregnancy, before she'd forgiven him and asked him to come to visit. Although, in the dream Mara-Lynn was still alive and agreeing with Christina that it was Josh's fault, everything was Josh's fault. He awoke with a start and a snort, his head wedged back against the window, mouth open, and tears damp on his cheek. He rubbed his eyes as if they'd watered in his sleep and smiled sheepishly at his aisle mate as he asked to be let out. Splashing cold water on his face in the bathroom, he caught a glimpse of an old, gray-haired man, a haunted man.

His flight changed in Atlanta, and he rode an underground rail not unlike the above-ground Blue Line at home. He rode the Blue Line to work, cheaper and easier than driving. He kept his car for his frequent visits to the track. Gin and greyhounds were his only vices. And cigarettes, although he'd thrown the pack away at the airport vowing to quit this week since Christy told him on the telephone she did not allow smoking in her house.

On the shuttle flight north he again claimed the window, reveling in the quilt of colors that blanketed the terrain below. He had never seen such vibrancy: ruby reds, day-glow oranges, citrus yellows, and lime-to-forest greens embroidering hillsides bordered with fields of perfectly-edged fallow rows. He'd seen photographs depicting fall in the East: Maine, Vermont, places like that. Somehow, he'd never expected it to be that beautiful in the South. As the plane touched the ground, Josh was amazed at the smallness of the airport, even more so when he cleared the gate and Christy flew into his arms. She kissed him and hugged his neck, hard, as her tears leaked down the corners of her eyes. "Oh, Daddy. I can't believe it's you! We're finally together; you're here! I've missed you so much. Brent's out front, circling; we can grab your bag and leave rather than park."

She wasn't kidding. It was less than half an L.A. block to the baggage pick-up where Josh immediately found his suitcase and followed her the few steps to the curb where Brent waited in a new silver BMW. Brent popped the trunk and slid out from behind the wheel, introducing himself, shaking hands, and welcoming his father-in-law to western North Carolina.

Christina kept up a constant chatter, easing the introduction between the two men and detailing her life and all of its changes to her

father. Josh noticed Brent called her Christina not Christy, but she would always be Christy to him. He thought her round belly looked small for six months, remembering how much he and Mara-Lynn had loved every change her body went through during Christy's gestation. Josh almost lost them both at the birth and counted himself lucky for the years that followed. He'd been blessed with a wife he adored, every day of her life. Not many men could say that. It was pretty obvious from his words and glances as he drove that Brent felt the same way about Christy. That alone was worth Josh's trip.

By the time they reached the house, night had taken hold, completely swallowing the colors of the surrounding forest. The thing that impressed Josh the most when they stopped the car was the quiet. The quiet and the stars; Josh had never seen so many, or if he had he didn't recall clearly anymore. The house was cedar with lots of windows radiating a soft, golden light. The glow couldn't dampen the innumerable sparkling points filling the sky above. "This is just beautiful," Josh said. Tears blurred his vision as happiness for his little girl overwhelmed him. He needed a drink. Suddenly, a flash of gray burst from the back of the house, ran straight for the small group and leapt, delivering a wet kiss to each face in turn. Christy laughed and said, "Let me make the introductions, Dad. This is your namesake Josh. We got him from Greyhound Rescue. Now he's part of our family. Aren't you, Josh?" Christina rubbed the dog's ears and held his collar to curb his jumping enthusiasm.

Maybe a drink wasn't so important after all. Maybe he'd spend some time getting to know his namesake, and his new son-in-law. Maybe there was a chance life had more to offer than he could have ever imagined a few short days ago.

Drawing by Mike O'Kane

Play Day

Joanne S. Johnston

Against a cold winter's sun,
Perched on a high branch above the highway,
the regal hawk looks like a monarch
surveying his domain.
Dressed in his winter robe of white trimmed in red,
he sits on a throne
made visible
by nature's production
which insists that leaves fall away.
For miles, valleys unfold
kissed here and there with misty touches of fog.
For miles, peaks rise and fall
as if painted on canvas.
For miles, the clear sky sends an invitation
to come to the playground
where soaring on thermals is a minimal exercise.
In a starkly beautiful setting,
king hawk accepts the invitation.

Drawing by Mike O'Kane

Signs
Painting by Fleta Monaghan

Notes on Contributors

Kenet Adamson teaches in the English and Developmental Studies Departments.

Annie Cicale teaches art in the Division of Continuing Education.

Richard J. De Luca teaches Spanish in the Humanities Department.

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***Victoria Press* continues to include contributions from neighboring community colleges. We thank each contributor, especially Keith Flynn.**

Drawing by Joan Worth

Victoria Press
2004

Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College

Watercolor by Annie Cicale

Victoria Press

Tenth Issue

Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College
Asheville, North Carolina

2004

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Table of Contents

Drawing by Annie Cicale iv
Summer: 1960 by Ron Rash 1
Drawing by Annie Cicale 1
Triptych by Ron Rash 2
Photograph by Derick Tickle 3
Dumb Supper by Ron Rash 4
Watercolor by Annie Cicale 5
First Light: Poems by Nancy Dillingham, Review by Celia Miles 6
Watercolor by Annie Cicale 8
Conviction by Nancy Dillingham 9
In the Garden by Nancy Dillingham 10
Marriage by Nancy Dillingham 11
Shivaree by Nancy Dillingham 11
Resolution by Nancy Dillingham 12
Borrowing Fire by Nancy Dillingham 12
Idaho by Nancy Dillingham 13
Sick/Spell by Nancy Dillingham 14
The Silver Jag by Celia Miles 15
Owl by Celia Miles 16
Haworth in the Spring by Celia Miles 17
Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin 17
Two-color wood engraving by Lauren Faulkenberry 18
Folie a Deux by Lauren Faulkenberry 19
From the Belly of the Furnace by Kathy Godfrey 30
Downtown Sociology 101(A True Story) by Lee Sokol 31
Photograph by Joe Franklin 31
Lies by Carolyn Pidgeon 32
Drawing by Annie Cicale 32
My Father by Kenet Adamson 33
Drawing by Annie Cicale 33

Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin 34
Westwindow by Will Hooper 36
Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin 36
Vision by Will Hooper 37
Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin 37
Get Lost: A Five Minute Screenplay by David Holcombe 38
Etching by Shirley McLaughlin 44
Winter Snakes by Randee Goodstadt 45
Mèxico, Mi Amor by Richard J. DeLuca 46
Follow Your Heart by Donna Helen Crisp 48
Untitled by Joe Allawos 49
Drawing by Shirley Lyon Garcia 49
A Possum Named Saddam, Dec. 13, 2003 by Chris Tibbetts 50
Two-color wood etching by Lauren Faulkenberry 53
Asheville, Rose Byrne, and the "Golden Age" by Joe Franklin 54
The Kiss by Julia Nunnally Duncan 60
Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin 63
Seattle to North Carolina by way of memory by Amy Goodman-Bide .64
Wives' Tales by Gabrielle Thompson 66
Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin 69
Notes on Contributors 70
Drawing by Annie Cicale 72

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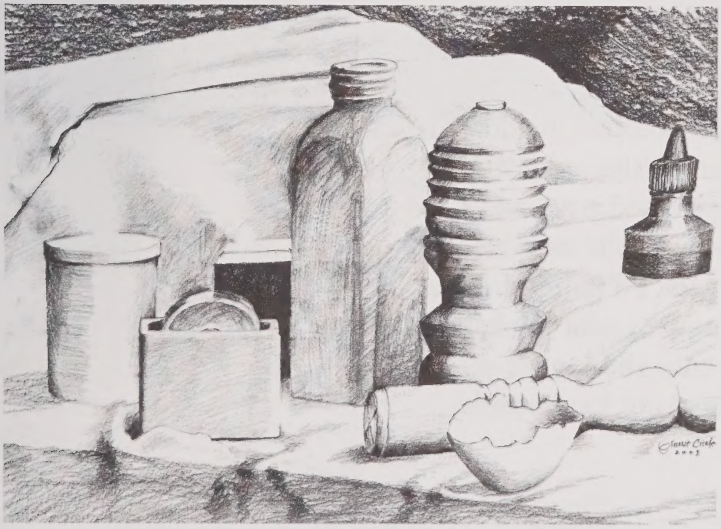
Drawing by Annie Cicale

Summer: 1960

Ron Rash

Supper over, grown-ups porched
with cigarettes and stories,
we slipped through barbed wire onto
government land, a field where
the parkway flowed out of woods
toward a gorge called Goshen.
It was only when they passed
we saw the tags, Florida
orange and white, Kentucky blue,
New Hampshire green as the grass
our bodies pressed as we dreamed
of all we had never seen,
each square of tin a post card
of possibility, but what
flowed away was behind us,
farmhouse boards weathering gray,
nails scabbing with rust, faces
dimming as fireflies flickered
like faltering lanterns.



Drawing by Annie Cicale

Triptych

Ron Rash

December, 1928

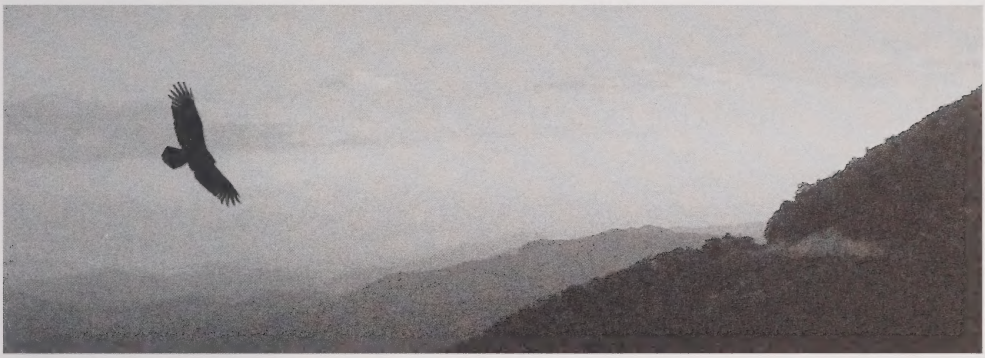
Sleet ticks the tin roof like time,
wick-light rafter-hung, the cold
whitening my grandfather's breath,
though he is not cold, work-warmed
as the wood plane rasps, sets free
bright smell of cedar to fill
this shed, while in the farmhouse
my grandmother is sleeping,
a schoolmarm now farm wife whose
gift this is, a bookshelf that
will take a lifetime to fill.

July, 1968

No paper, television,
what news elsewhere stayed elsewhere,
even time set in the past.
When dark came unbleached muslin
shawled her knees as she raveled
the hod's thread-balls with beeswax,
then knit and knotted, made bedspeads
whose Rose of Sharon design
the sightless could read, and I
sitting nearby as she worked,
in my lap what I'd pulled from
the front room's cedar bookshelf,
No sound until she looked up
and said, read out loud awhile.

December, 2001

My aunt's home now, the bookshelf
moved years back to the back room
where I sit in bed this night,
book in hand as I listen
to the tick of sleet against
the window while cold seeps through
hardwood planks into this room
where I will soon place the book
back on the bookshelf, and sleep
beneath the Rose of Sharon.



Photograph by Derick Tickle

Dumb Supper

Ron Rash

She knew the old way to know,
pone of cornbread soaked with salt,
eaten in silence so dreams
might bring the man she'd marry
to her bedside, cupped palms filled
with water to slake her thirst.

Who came was her fear–James Boone,
white-haired and toothless, one wife
already worked to her grave,
who courted with talk of corn
and beans not canned, socks not darned,
hoe handles needing young hands.

Good enough match, her mother
claimed next day, but what she'd sipped
from Boone's hands was not water,
just more salt. Torchlight found her
in the French Broad come nightfall,
eyes closed but mouth wide open.

Watercolor by Annie Cicale

First Light: Poems by Nancy Dillingham

Review by Celia Miles

Some books of poetry are for keeping, just as some are for putting on the shelf and eying occasionally when one wants the simplicity of childhood nostalgia for another era or the challenge of wending one's intellectual way through the linguistic maze of another's mind. But some poems are for keeping, for returning to, for sticking close by. Such are the poems in Nancy Dillingham's third book, *First Light*.

Some images are "soft as smoke rising," ("First Light"), some slice through your senses so sharply you hurt ("On the edge/of madness/save for fractious fowl/garrulous guineas/in the field/creating a din..."). Some poems are so expressive they leave you knowing you'll never experience a particular scene or object the same way after reading Nancy's take on it: "Wheat Field," for example: "Liquescent/as fire/the grass/like glass/undulates/with light." This image stays in the same way Wordsworth's "Solitary Reaper, yon solitary Highland lass" remains with the reader long after her song and his words are gone.

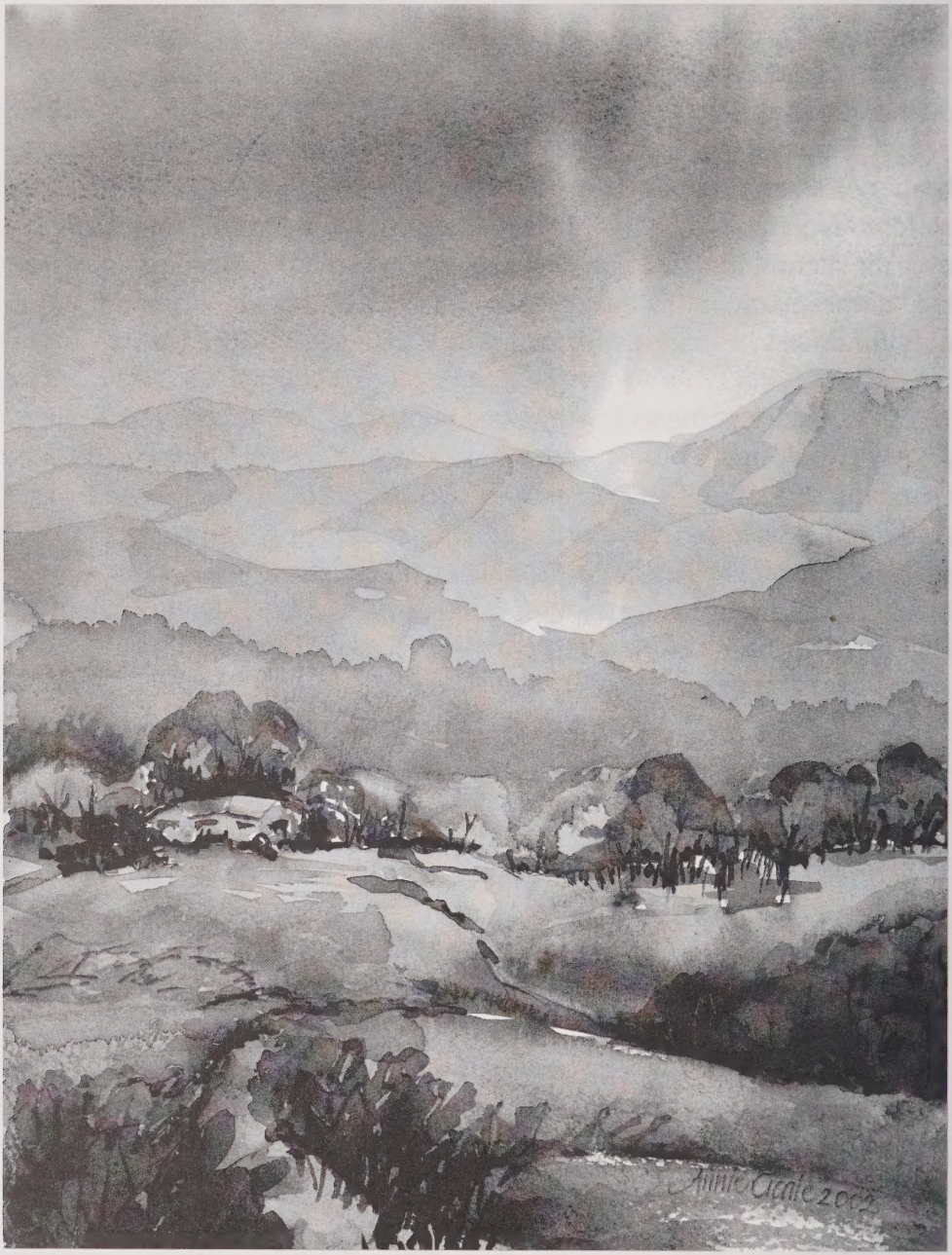
Ranging from six lines (10 words) to three pages–imagistic, narrative, dense as a laurel thicket, clean as the hogkiller's knife, precise as a lightning flash–these poems catch at your spirit; they linger like a memory. Simple? Hardly.

I've been rereading some of Stanley Kunitz's poems, returning to them after long years of being overwhelmed by their syntax in college; I treat them like intellectual exercises, studying the structure, the diction, the punctuation, finding in some of them, over-grammared and over-flighty as they are, a pleasure in discovery. After long careful reading, an occasional wow...that's what he's saying! Perfectly legitimate, but reading that way is thin pleasure beside reading *First Light*'s perfectly honed phrases, perfectly aligned words. Dillingham's poems tap our emotional keyboard with deft and delicate yet meaty and strong vocabulary. She's not "playing with the reader's mind" so much as illuminating the spirit. Rather than being irritated by what the poet conceals, the reader is drawn in by the spare silences between words. As a master carver removes to reveal essence, this poet pares away verbiage and peels back syllables. The result is stellar–poems blindingly immediate as sticking tongue to frozen metal.

Dillingham writes of the pioneer woman ("Pioneer woman/in all my silences/ I think of you"), the mountain woman ("There is a landscape/of the heart/that sets us apart"), and gives her the universal womanhood grounded in the specific ("Still/as a white sapling/she stands/ daguerreotyped/by the night"). The listing of herbs, the description of a diamondback rattlesnake, the "fence of flowers"–it's all poetry.

This collection moves us through the seasons, the hurts, the beauty of a hard life with touches of humor (surely most mountain children remember the woeful "Big Toe Tale"); but there's no glossing over the painful miscarriage, the snakebitten child, the mood of the wife, the "umber statue in the dusk," who waits in the doorway when the unfaithful husband returns from his week with her sister in Idaho.

If you're going to buy just one book of poetry this year, buy *First Light*. If you're going to buy three books of poetry, buy Dillingham's *New Ground* (1998), her *The Ambiguity of Morning* (2001), and *First Light*. And don't expect these books to gather dust or merely add to your shelved collection; they are to be read again and again. To paraphrase Flannery O'Connor's story title: A good poem is hard to find. You can find plenty of them in *First Light*.



Watercolor by Annie Cicale

Excerpts from *First Light*

Nancy Dillingham

Conviction

Through the yard
the bloodhounds ran
tracking a loose convict . . .

It happened in the hen house . . .
When she lifted the latch
the convict rose before her
like Lazarus

One breast in his hand
he tore at her clothes
then disappeared
like an apparition
into the woods

She rose on watery legs
gathered her eggs
into her worn felt hat
without breaking one . . .

She heard it coming
from a long way off
a persistent buzzing
in her head like the droning of bees

It was her own voice
spiraling within her
dark and coiled
writhing like a snake
ready to strike

her scream
raping the morning's silence

In the Garden

fall, from the Old English *feallan*, to fall down

Under molten skies
she spies
Henry
black-as-indigo
field hand

spread out
like a week's washing
against the fence stobs
head back
arms akimbo

She opens
her mouth
ready to go
into her familiar
rigamarole

Henry, you been out all night–
got tight–didn't make it home?

when
she sees
he's still
as some old
scarecrow

while a bird
pecks at
one of his eyes
as if his face were
a discarded corncob

Marriage

Fifteen
and not many chances
for courting . . .

When they say
her husband plucked her
like a flower
from his first wife's grave
(new mother for
his four small children)
it is so . . .

A quick stab of pain
a drop of blood
escharotic
she made her peace
with passion . . .

It is hardscrabble life
she romances now

Shivaree

Having jumped the broom
in her Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes
and only pair of shoes
she steps close to the affray
over the threshold
out of the frying pan
into the fire

Resolution

Her resolve
is like looking
for lizards
in the creek

turning over
the rocks
waiting for the disturbance
to clear

Borrowing Fire

From her mother's hearth
she lifts live coals
coaxes them
into the iron pot
carries them carefully
as eggs in a basket

their red eyes glowing
on the cold road home

Idaho

"You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles . . . repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal
of your body love what it loves."
Mary Oliver

Uncle Jeff
dropping everything
ran off to Idaho
with Aunt Ida
stayed all
of one week
before he came crawling
back home
like a sheep-killing dog
with his tail tucked
between his legs
Aunt Pallie standing
in the front door
waiting for him
a soft umber statue
in the dusk
holding a coffee cup
in her hands

come back, baby
come on home
supper's ready
bread's done
your coffee's hot

Sick/Spell

Steeped in memory
and half-sleep
the scent of mint
drifting
elusive as the smell
of spring water
wafting through a tangle
of touch-me-nots
and roots
I dream
her remedies:

poultice of onions
for pneumonia
boneset
for flu
butterfly root
for pleurisy
sassafras tea
to sweat the fever
tinct of kerosene
on a teaspoon of sugar
to cut the metallic strangulation
of croup
asafetida bags
to ward off colds
sumac and elderberries
for the throat
witch hazel
for dressing . . .

Easy as light she comes
her cool hand caressing

The Silver Jag

Celia Miles

Sometimes I see it still–that orange globe, that golden glow atop the dark mountain, that moon that became metaphor. I was barely twenty, remarkably innocent, romantic to the core. And in love. We were driving home from college–my "older man" boyfriend and I. He had arrived in his silver Jaguar at the Kentucky campus to pick me up. I'd shown him off to a couple of most-close friends and kept him away from the inspection of dorm mother Mrs. Borland. She'd never have let me start out with a man only a year or so younger than my dad, start on a seven-hour unchaperoned journey with a clearly sophisticated engineer, in a white shirt and tie. Even if my parents had written a note, which, of course, they hadn't, thinking I was with hometown Ricky Briggs.

I was in heaven–the leather seats, the masculine smell of cigarettes and cologne, the radio tuned to soft romantic sounds. We swung through the mountains of east Tennessee and were, I think, ascending Cumberland Mountain. I had abandoned my glasses, needed, I assured myself, only for reading, not for swooning beside my man. I begged and received permission to drive on the empty highway and the sense of gliding smoothness on the road was one never communicated in our old black Ford. The darkness enveloped us and so the silence. I glanced up and sighed a long sigh. "Look at that beautiful moon," I said in my newly acquired husky-with-love voice.

Jim looked up and then looked over at me. "Pull this car over to the side of the road," he said. "That's not the moon. It's a God damn Gulf station sign."

That moment was a defining one for me, revealing the chasm between magic and reality, between what I was sure I saw and what was, in fact, there, between the glow of youthful naivete and the armor of adult awareness. Love wasn't lost that night and I drove the silver Jag a few more times, but the moon has never been quite the same for me.

Owl

Celia Miles

Solitary, perched in twilight,
watching, in the guise of
meditating, the world go by,
I am wise, or indifferent
in my daytime Penseroso pose.
Mostly I watch, unruffled,
indifferent even to what happens at my feet.

I sit, absorb, catch
only what I need
with a swift downward swoop,
but high flight is not for me
nor brash power playing.

Content,
on my territorial limb
in my middle world, I
neither crab-scuttle on the forest floor
nor eagle-soar in the sunbeams or
the fleeting cloud.

Like the Indian guru and the Grecian sage,
I was never young.
My realm is wisdom
gained by passive observing, open pores.
Yet my voice provides no answer
only a plaintive who-who-who.

Haworth in the Spring

Celia Miles

Maria Bronte b. 1814 d. 1825

Elizabeth Bronte b. 1815 d. 1825

June 1998 after a visit to the Parsonage Museum

How scrawny here the daffodils
in meager window boxes
arranged by women
seeking yellow splashes in the gray
From the moor the smell of wet sheep
from the Black Bull stale beer, strong ale
and on the steep High Street
domestic frothy scents of soap
on washed door stoops and
from within fried bread, rashers, black tea
In gritty sunlight turning I think I see
coming up the cobbled street
Charlotte, Emily, Anne in mourning black
hesitating, waiting for reluctant Branwell.
He kicks a cringing sooty cat, then follows.

Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin

Two-color wood engraving by Lauren Faulkenberry

"Folie a Deux"

Lauren Faulkenberry

You know those movies where the maniacal character suffocates some unsuspecting, kittenish antihero with a pillow? I wondered if you could do that to yourself, without the aid of a diabolical sidekick. I yanked the fluffy mass of goose-down from behind me and shoved it over my face, wincing as the ends of the feathers pricked my cheeks. Is it possible to suffocate yourself, or would the muscles in your arms relax just in time to release the pressure and allow another breath? I pushed harder, but that only pinched the bridge of my nose and made me inhale an entire colony of dust mites. Things that work in the movies never work in real life. I should know that by now.

The door opened and I tossed the pillow aside, rolling off of the bed in a coughing, sneezing melodrama.

Myra, my roommate, has never learned the delicate art of knocking. Not even after walking in on scenes inspired by late-night cable television that would have made the devil blush.

"Joe, what are you doing?" she said.

"Nothing," I said, striding past her into the kitchen. "Nothing at all."

She followed me, babbling about meningitis, ulcers, diverticulitis, and other potential candidates for her demise. It's always like this, because Myra thinks she's going to die–every day. While other girls her age were going to fraternity parties and football games and fooling around with their boyfriends, she was busy falling in love with disease. Even now, when those same girls are getting married and divorced, she's reading medical books in a dark corner of our apartment, dog-earing her favorite pages. She still gets a new book every other day and reads it from cover to cover, hunting for symptoms that match hers. The librarian had to cut her off last week because the medical students had finals coming up, and all of the books about rare diseases had come to settle on our coffee table.

Myra's a walking encyclopedia of infections, parasites, genetic disorders and chronic afflictions. She has all of the symptoms memorized, knows every warning sign by heart, and sees potential sickness in every activity, from scrambling eggs to crossing the street.

She won't walk around anywhere barefoot, even inside our apartment. "Who knows what the last tenants did in here," she says. She still wears flip flops in the shower, terrified that she'll pick up athlete's foot, even though I'm the only other person who showers here. I've told her a hundred times that she's safe with me, since I don't have an athletic bone in my body, but she's not buying. Her naked feet have never felt the tickle of summer grass beneath them, and she scoffs whenever I lapse into an innocent childhood pleasure and wriggle my toes on the lawn. "You'll get hookworms," she says. "They'll devour your intestines."

I don't know what made her this way–her childhood photos indicate a healthy youth, and I've seen both of her parents invoke the five-second rule at Christmas when an errant chocolate cookie rolled across the kitchen tile. Whatever her ailment is, it's been with her ever since I've known her. She a shrink's cash cow and roommate's nightmare, but at least she pays the rent on time.

"I feel terrible," she said. "Look. Tiredness, fatigue, and nausea. My back hurts, my feet hurt, and my stomach hurts. It could be mono."

"How could you possibly have mono? No one you know has it."

She stuck a thermometer under her tongue. "You don't need friends to get mono, you can get it from anyone."

"You don't get close enough to anyone to get mono," I said, rummaging through the silverware drawer.

She sighed, poking her stomach, checking her pulse.

"Kissed any sick boys? Had any wild romps that were peppered with coughs?" I didn't have to look up to be struck by her icy glare.

"I'm glad you're taking this so seriously," she said. "Could you just drive me to the hospital please?"

I dug through the drawer, shoved potato smashers, steak knives, and salad tongs aside, pausing to study an ice pick. "I'm a little busy right now. It's probably just something you ate. Or one of those weird teas you drink."

"It's not the Lapsang Souchong," she said frowning. "But it could be my appendix."

I pulled a kiwi from the refrigerator. It looked fuzzier than usual, and several weeks old, but for my purposes it was fine. She rambled on about her appendix, clutching her side and poking her belly, while I hacked the kiwi into slimy chunks.

"What's that for?" she said.

"Never mind. You have enough to worry about with that rupturing appendix." I skewered the sticky fruit with the last of our fondue forks and held it a few inches from my tongue.

"What are you doing?" she said. "You'll break out in hives."

She was right, of course. I'm deathly allergic to kiwi fruit. I waved the stick at her, the green juice dripping onto the tile. "Just leave me alone," I said.

"What is wrong with you?" She took a step toward me.

"Hey!" I backed into the corner, holding the kiwi to my lips. "Back away, or the kiwi gets it."

She sighed. "Can't you think of a less painful way to go? Some way that won't make your face swell up like a basketball?"

I could think of lots of different ways. In fact, I've tried lots of different ways. I tried to hold my breath and suffocate once, but I just blacked out and cracked my head open on the bathroom floor. That cost me three hundred dollars and fourteen stitches, and I didn't even meet any cute nurses in the process. Then I went to one of those churches where they do the hokey-pokey with rattlesnakes, shaking them all about. It was way out in the woods, far out from town where nobody knew me, and miles from any hospital. It might have worked if the snakes hadn't been de-fanged and drugged. They were a pitiful excuse for heinous venomous serpents. They wouldn't even nibble.

"You know that's going to hurt like hell," Myra said. "Your tongue swells, your throat closes up, your heart pounds right out of your chest, and your head feels like it's going to blow like Vesuvius, along with the fact that you can't breathe."

I stared at her, peeling the furry skin from the kiwi.

"There are easier ways to go," she said. "Ways that won't require a closed casket."

I never have liked doing things the predictable way, but I don't really want to make a scene, either. It's sort of rude to go and leave a big mess for someone else to clean up. Especially when it's something as big as a body. As I considered this, she stomped on my foot and snatched the fork from my hand. These tangents of unselfish thoughts will ultimately be my undoing.

"Ouch!" I said. "Give it."

She rolled her eyes and smashed the kiwi into the garbage disposal. "You're such a dork."

"Fine," I said. "I didn't want an audience anyway."

That night I dreamt of a hundred ways to make my exit–diving from a cliff into a shallow lagoon filled with hungry piranha, being flattened by a Mardi Gras float full of clowns that mocked me in French or devoured by a pack of feral dogs with matted fur and crooked teeth. They say that your dreams reflect unfinished business. I have these dreams almost every night. But not always with the clowns.

The next morning, hoping that a change in my daily routine might eliminate feral dog-related nightmares, or at the very least entertain me, I went to the pet store and bought a spotted rabbit named Burt. I coughed and wheezed all the way home.

When Myra came in, she found me curled up in the recliner with Burt, ruffling his fur and stroking his ears, sending clouds of rabbit dander swirling around the room. I stared at her through watery eyes, coughing and sneezing, covered in hives. I could hardly breathe, but Burt seemed happy enough, enjoying the best massage of his life.

Myra flopped down on the couch, seemingly oblivious. Typical, since she rarely recognizes problems in others, unless they're contagious. "I think I may have nasal polyps," she said, flipping through her encyclopedia of rare diseases. "Joe, did you hear me? I have swelling and sniffling, and these small protuberances on my nose are a clear indication that something is amiss."

I scratched Burt's back and took a deep breath. I covered his velvety ears, so as not to shatter them with my thunderous string of sneezes.

"You can't do this now," she said, poking her nose and staring into a compact mirror. "I need a ride to the hospital."

"Do these small protuberances of yours inhibit your driving ability?"

"I could have a seizure or something–respiratory failure. My heart could stop. I'd wreck the car and then need a blood transfusion and probably pick up hepatitis."

"I think you just need a new facial cleanser," I said between coughs. "Those look like pimples from here."

She hurled a pillow at me, startling Burt. "You are a pathetic, self-indulgent, pitiful excuse for a masochist. Can't you think of a quick way?"

"Chet Baker jumped out of a window in Amsterdam," I said. "That was pretty quick."

"Fascinating," she said. "Why don't you try that?"

"Too messy. And too much of a scene. Do you really want to be left with a Joe-sized splatter underneath your living room window?"

"It doesn't have to be my window."

"And you'd be on the ten o'clock news, the grieving friend, with some stupid reporter asking, 'Now that your friend has leapt from your window, how does that make you feel?' And you'd have to go down to the police station, where they'd make you sit in the same chairs that hookers and drug dealers sit in, where you're sure to catch something debilitating or venereal at the very least."

She stared at me through narrowed eyes, scratching her nose. Burt's ears twitched, flopping in opposite directions.

"Then surely you can think of a cleaner way that's equally quick," she said.

Trains are quick. About a month ago I had the idea to walk down the railroad tracks behind our building. It would happen in a flash–I'd never know what hit me, except that I would because I'd planned the whole thing. As I was hopping from one tie to another, it occurred to me that when my mangled body was recovered, people would think that I'd been drunk, or stoned, or just plain stupid. Or maybe all three. I could hear the chatter–"I thought that guy was smart. He went to Cornell, you know. Top of his class." I couldn't have everyone thinking I was a complete idiot. I needed a more calculated, intellectual exit–one that would be poetic and charmingly appropriate–one that would make all of my former friends and lovers, consumed by guilt and loathing, sob quietly for days on end, asking why, why. My decision to opt for a way that left me standing in a more favorable light was interrupted by an ear-splitting whistle. I tripped on a tie, hit the rail with a thud, and saw that my sneaker was stuck. In a disgusted panic, thinking how terribly unjust it was that my final demise would immortalize me as a careless fool, I yanked my foot out of my favorite sneaker, seconds before it was crushed into bits by the South Line's 3:25 soybean shipment. That little blunder

set me back another two hundred and eighteen dollars and left me with a chipped front tooth and a mangled velveteen sneaker. The surviving shoe now sits on my mantle, quietly mocking my cowardice and reminding me of the indignity of it all. I have since been unable to drink soy milk.

"I hope that rabbit's had its shots," Myra said, frowning. She twirled a lock of honey-colored hair, searching for split ends. "They're prone to rabies and all sorts of nasty bacteria that turn your brain to soup and leave you squirming in a straightjacket in a padded room."

I sneezed, scratching the rash that had spread over my arms.

"And it would be just my luck that the stupid thing would bite me and not you," she said. "How can you just sit there and let your lungs fill with fur and dander and rabbit cooties? Why do you insist on torturing yourself?"

"Myra, if I wanted to be nagged to death, I'd go to my mother's." I stood, placing Burt back in the recliner. "Now if you'll excuse me, I'm going to take a bath."

I sank into the water, further and further until I was lying on the bottom, staring at the light overhead, rippling through the sting of chlorine. (The water in our building is terrible. Myra won't even brush her teeth with it, citing all sorts of health violations–magnesium, chromium, protozoa. People pay good money for blue-green algae, but we get ours for free.) I closed my eyes and listened as the bubbles from my last breath broke the surface. I'd often thought that drowning would be a quiet, peaceful way to go, but then I saw a documentary about mobsters and the hapless victims they tossed into various inlets and bays with concrete blocks chained to their limbs. I learned that it takes twelve minutes to drown–twelve minutes for your lungs to fill with water and your heart to run out of oxygen, for your pulse to slow, for your heart to stop, all the while creating a burning sensation that feels like someone is slowly carving your chest into tiny pieces. After seeing the vivid re-enactment on the nature channel, it didn't seem so peaceful.

When my chest began to sting, I lifted my head and leaned back in the tub, eyeing the radio on the counter. It probably didn't have enough juice to fry an egg, much less a disgruntled twenty-six year-old, but I consider myself an optimist. I sat up and flipped it on. As Billie Holiday sang about her low-down man, I pulled it towards the water, and stopped at the lip of the old tub.

The cord was just an inch too short. Even my bathroom taunts me.

I leaned back and stared at my feet, the freakish second toes that were longer than my big toes. I heard once that this anomaly means you can have anyone you want, but my life so far offers no support of that theory. I wish I could say I had a good reason for wanting to take a bath with a radio, like I'd accidentally shot someone, or lost a few million dollars that weren't mine, or been sentenced for a life of crime. But it was none of those things. It was just because of a girl. A girl who said she didn't need me anymore.

These things are always because of a girl, aren't they?

Myra doesn't know much about death. She is just afraid of it. I, on the other hand, have cheated death countless times. Or maybe it's cheated me. I worked for the phone company once, when I was twenty, climbing up the poles and checking the transformers. That is until I got knocked off of one by 12,000 volts. I just let my screwdriver slide a little too far to the left, and the next thing I knew I was lying flat on my back fifteen feet below. They said the only thing that saved me was my baseball cap. If I'd been wearing a hardhat, like I was supposed to, I would have been toast. (At that time, it hadn't occurred to anyone that the metal fittings in the hardhats probably weren't such a good idea.)

They called it amazing, unbelievable, a miraculous recovery. I couldn't figure out why it happened at all. I wasn't an important member of society, a pillar of the community, or even an upstanding citizen, really. I just fixed transformers.

With my hair still dripping from the bath, I trudged through the living room and grabbed my coat. "I'm going down to the bar. You want to come?"

She looked up from her magazine. "Not if you're going to pick a fight. I don't want to see you get shot, and I'm not in the mood for a bloodborne disease."

"I'm not going for a bullet, I'm going for a drink. And just for the record, I don't intend to be shot, ever. If you're shot in a bar, then people automatically assume you were up to no good and you go down in history as a ruffian, a hooligan, and people think you had it coming. Then they tell your story at cocktail parties and shake their heads, saying in unison, 'What a waste.'"

She sighed and turned back to the magazine.

"Take Sam Cooke for example. A master of soul, fine citizen, legend of his time. Took a bullet from a jealous husband, and his name was mud."

"I thought the woman shot him," she said.

"Either way, it sort of ruins 'Cupid' for you, doesn't it?"

"Go out like that and you'll get pneumonia," she said.

"Would you at least keep me company while my lungs fill with fluid? It's depressing to go to a bar alone, and you can't actually die of loneliness."

She tossed the magazine aside and got her own coat from the closet. Generally, convincing Myra to go out to a public place is like pulling teeth. She refuses to eat in restaurants, complaining of various biological hazards. She's terrified of food that's been prepared out of her line of sight, and sanitation grades mean nothing to her–that's just a bell curve of relative contamination. She's already crossed the majority of staples off her list, anyway. Fruits are laden with pesticides, grains are infected by a cornucopia of bacteria, and meats are a breeding ground for disaster. She most recently gave up beef because of the outbreak of mad cow disease–you can't be sure that British cows didn't defect over here, she says. It's not like they need little bovine passports. For now, she'll eat only what she cooks, and she boils mercilessly to make sure she kills everything, including the taste. Ours is the most sterile kitchen east of the Mississippi.

We sat in the darkest corner of the bar, where the neon lights buzzed and flickered overhead. I ordered my usual pair of tequila shots. She had her usual–nothing.

"Those things'll kill you," she said.

I smiled. "Not nearly fast enough. Aren't you going to do a shot with me?"

But of course, she wasn't. I'd seen her drink only once, and that was by accident. She thought Long Island iced tea was a blend, like Oolong or Irish Breakfast. Somebody at a party convinced her to try one, and by the time she discovered the distinct lack of tea, she didn't care. The next morning she rolled out of bed thinking she was having an aneurysm. I probably should have warned her, but there are certain moments when your life becomes like a train wreck, and you feel compelled to watch the inevitable occur. When I later revealed the true

contents of the tea, she was convinced she had the beginning stages of cirrhosis of the liver, or alcohol poisoning at the very least. She still blames me for the whole incident, and to this day, won't drink anything but bottled water. She says milk is full of bacteria, juices are packed with pesticides, beer is just bottled candida, and coffee makes you sterile. And she won't drink anything at a bar, period. There's the constant threat of hepatitis–she cringes every time I poke a lime into a Corona. The last time I had whiskey she informed me that it sits in barrels teeming with bacteria and yeast for god knows how long. "You're a walking petri dish," she said. Even the thought of sharing glasses appalls her. "Just imagine how many lips have touched those highball glasses, and just imagine where all those lips have been!"

I try to get her to live a little, hoping that one day she won't need somebody like me to drag her out into the world. I thought I was making progress, but after about an hour my plans were sullied by a couple of innocent nicotine addicts. They sat down behind us and lit their cigarettes, and Myra immediately started choking, ranting about emphysema and lung cancer between sips from the water she'd smuggled in with her purse.

"I can feel my chest tightening," she said. "I can feel the tobacco sticking in my alveoli!" She started a coughing fit, crying "asthma attack" even though she's never had asthma in her entire life. I was captured in another train-wreck moment as the wheezing continued and she grabbed a paper bag from the table next to ours. Unfortunately it had a few crumbs in the bottom. She took a deep breath and then doubled over, coughing wildly. All eyes in the room were focused on us. Even the neon above us ceased its flickering. I dropped my head in my hand as the two guys behind us abruptly pounded their cigarettes into the ashtray and fled to the bar.

She finally caught her breath after a few pats on the back, but it was too late. She was sure her lungs had been ruined, and muttered something about aspirating as I smashed a bottle on the table and held the glass to my throat.

"For god's sake, Myra, get a hold of yourself or I'll end it right here!"

She continued hacking, her eyes bulging. Whether it was because of asphyxiation or surprise, I couldn't tell.

"You know I don't want to make a mess, but I swear I'm about to go back on my word and make an exception."

She clutched her throat and yelled between coughs, defending her civil right to enjoy a bottle of mineral water without fear of developing emphysema.

"You can't allow yourself to have a normal day and behave like a normal person!" I yelled.

"Don't talk to me about being normal," she said. "You're a walking corpse. Every night I go to bed picturing how I'm going to find your lifeless body in the morning, and every day, I find it in the same place, slumped in a dark corner of the room, plotting its own demise, but too chicken to ever get it over with."

By then a crowd had gathered. I dropped the glass and stared at Myra in silence. The bartender took that opportunity to grab us both by the arm and shove us out onto the sidewalk, threatening to have us thrown in jail. We trudged down the street in cold, dark silence, Myra just a few steps ahead of me.

Back at the apartment, she made a beeline for the medicine cabinet to begin her nightly vitamin ritual. She stumbled across the living room and collapsed on the couch in a heap. Between half-hearted sniffles and coughs, she lined up the usual suspects. Calcium, ginkgo, iron, potassium, zinc, and the countless others, arranged on our coffee table like little Rockettes. The three aspirin I swallowed in the kitchen paled in comparison.

I handed her a glass of water to wash down the row of pills.

"That's not from the tap is it?"

I'd lie and save myself a walk back to the kitchen, but she'd just think I was trying to poison her.

I returned with a bottle of water. The label had a picture of a quiet mountain lake, somewhere in Canada, no doubt. Part of me wanted to tell her all about the exposè I saw on the nature channel about the companies that were busted for selling "crystal clear mountain spring water" when, in fact, the hidden cameras caught them filling bottles from a hose behind a gas station adjacent to an old nuclear test site. She tossed her head back, popping vitamins two at the time. She took a couple of extras to fight off any infection she may have picked up from the bar, since it is, in fact, a teeming cesspool of potential disease.

"Have you ever wondered what really goes into that?"

She stared at me blankly and started the next row. "What?"

"Nothing," I said. The truth doesn't always set you free.

I considered a massive consumption of vitamins, and wondered what a lethal dose would be. Then I realized that I probably couldn't take more than Myra had, and she was fine. Relatively speaking, that is. Even if I could overdose on ginkgo biloba, I'd probably just end up with a stomach pump and live in infamy on the back page of the local paper. And really, who wants that?

I sneezed as Burt hopped into my lap and twitched his ears. He seemed to be unfazed by my fits of coughing, ignoring them just as Myra did. I watched as she washed the last of the pills down, in alphabetical order, just out of habit. I stared at her stack of medical books, stroking Burt's ears, and realized that I couldn't leave. Not just yet, anyway. If I left, there would be no one to limit her needless doctor visits, and her insurance rates would go through the roof. Someone had to make her leave the apartment every now and then and make sure she drank something besides water. There was still hope for her, but she needed a gradual reintroduction to the natural order of things, one health hazard at a time. She needed me to be her constant, to keep her well, to take her mind off of her senseless obsession every once in a while.

Besides, I had Burt to think about now. Myra certainly wasn't going to risk rabies to feed him baby carrots and potato skins. Trapped in another moment of weakness, another selfless tangent, I hardly noticed when she leaned across the end table and scratched his downy ears.

She smiled as one ear flopped over his eye. "He's pretty cute," she said.

"Yeah," I said. "He is."

From the Belly of the Furnace

Kathy Godfrey

this man I know believes
God is speaking
under the 21st street bridge
broken down cardboard pile
on reams of bags and napkins and stolen yard sale posters
covered with divine transcription
tires thwacking across bridge seams
jotted meticulously in dashes and stops
gold fuzzing the twilight skyline twice
recorded in scrupulous accounts
across Harris Teeter bags paper not plastic
faces blowing by cold glass
eyes hollow howling all
thumbed in coal smudges
filed away with Truth not malice
without malice or forethought
this man I know captures
life as God speaks
mosaic revelation
partners
this man I know and he who spoke worlds into light

one gave life
the other agreed to live
for now keep watch over
driving rush hour between them
humming along a song that ended five miles back
tires marking time

Downtown Sociology 101
(A True Story)

Lee Sokol

I was downtown on a work errand one sunny morning last spring and had a flat tire. Luckily, there was a free parking space right by Pritchard Park. A white woman about my age (nearing 50) and carrying the book *501 Spanish Verbs* stopped to help. We were having a go at the lug nuts when a nicely dressed black man carrying a tennis racquet came out of the bank. He looked at us and said, "Women's Lib is good." Then he smiled and walked away. I told the woman to go on to wherever she was headed. As she left she said, "This is empowering." A couple of minutes later, a homeless and toothless black guy came up and said, "Let me do that. You're a woman." As he struggled with the somewhat stripped lug nuts, he mumbled, "I'm a homeless person doing a good deed. Maybe there'll be something in this for me." Finally, as he was putting the lug nuts on the spare tire, a white homeless guy tried to help him. The first guy said to him, "No, man. This one's mine."

Photograph by Joe Franklin

Lies

Carolyn Pidgeon

Twisting, tangling, twining, terrible
Vines
Tightening, strangling
As they grow
Into thick sinews
Of bestial strength.

Even the straightest, strongest oak
Succumbs
The flow of sap choked
As it reaches for the sun
And digs its feet in.
The thick merciless vines
Enmeshed in its flesh,
The vines that began
Two innocent leaves

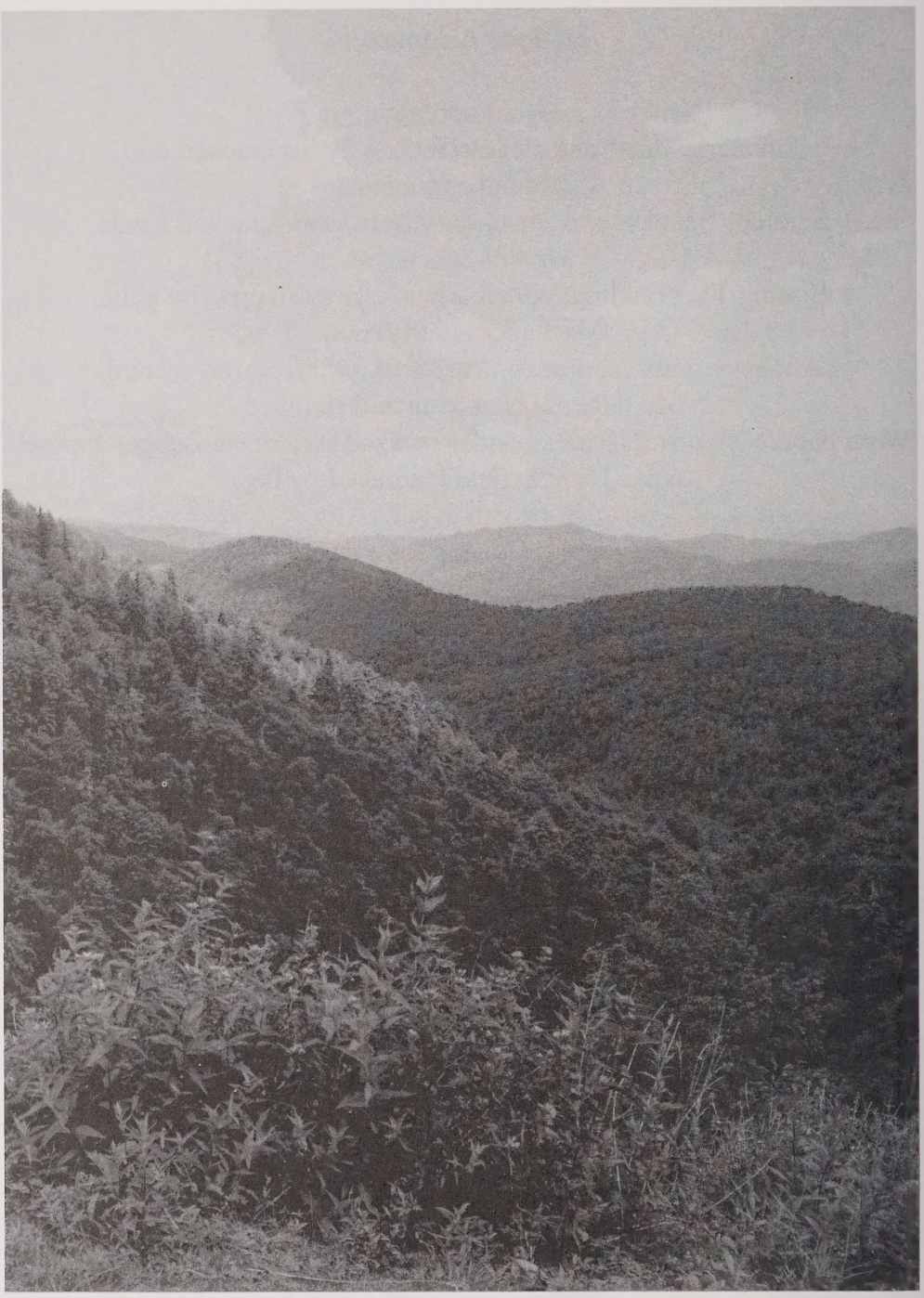
Drawing by Annie Cicale

My Father

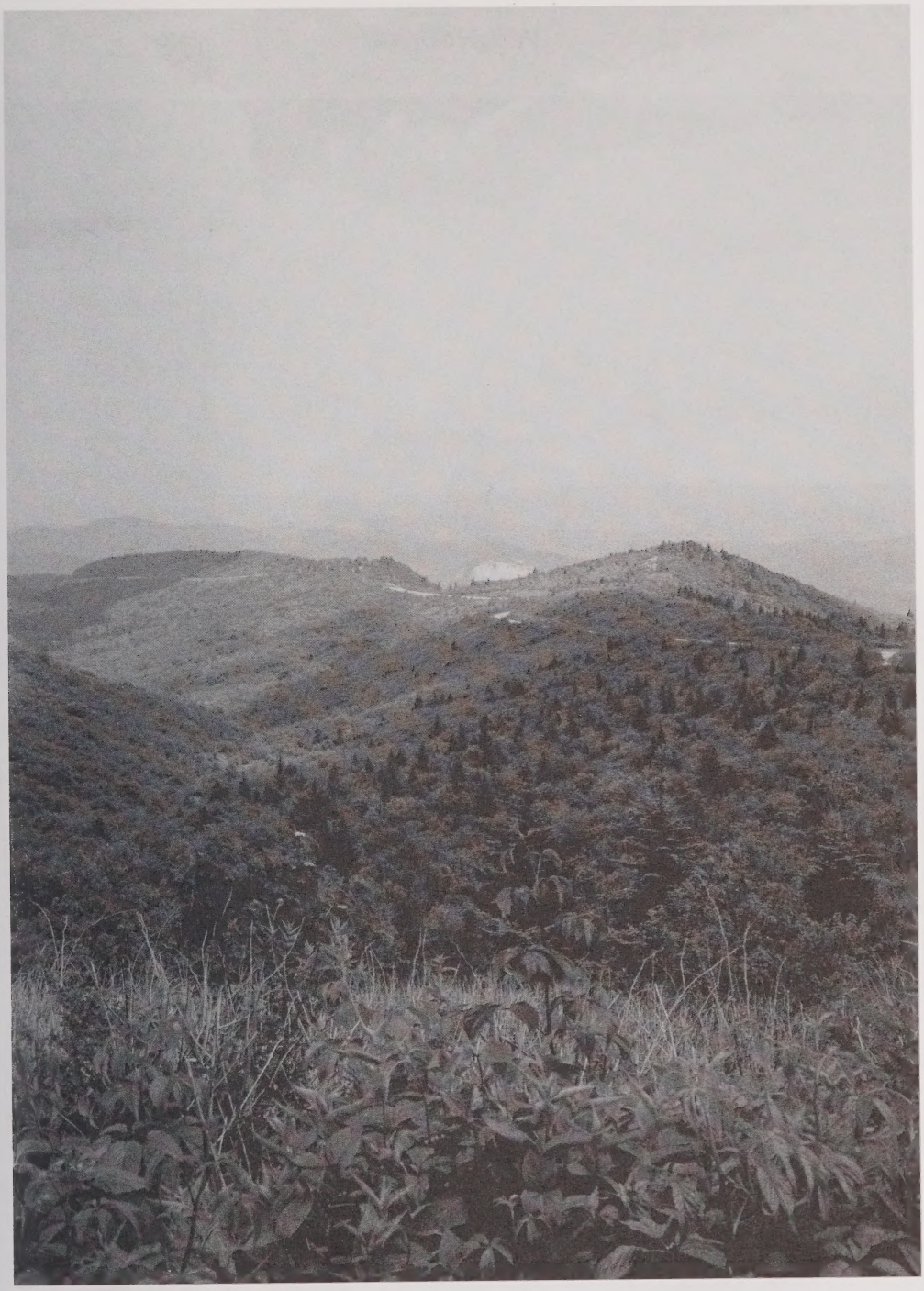
Kenet Adamson

My father is gin.
Tanqueray bitter and clean clenched by his cracked mitt.
My father is pain.
Scratchy beard, sharp smack on a butt, work-cracked hands.
My father is noise.
Blaring TV, crinkling *USA Today*, a canvas slapped by paint.
My father is fatty food.
Anchovy pizza, cheese fondue, steak tartar, frozen custard.
My father is broken-in and rumpled.
Worn paperback novel jacketed with vivid red Wisconsin Badger apparel,
a small boy's hand embraced by his.

Drawing by Annie Cicale

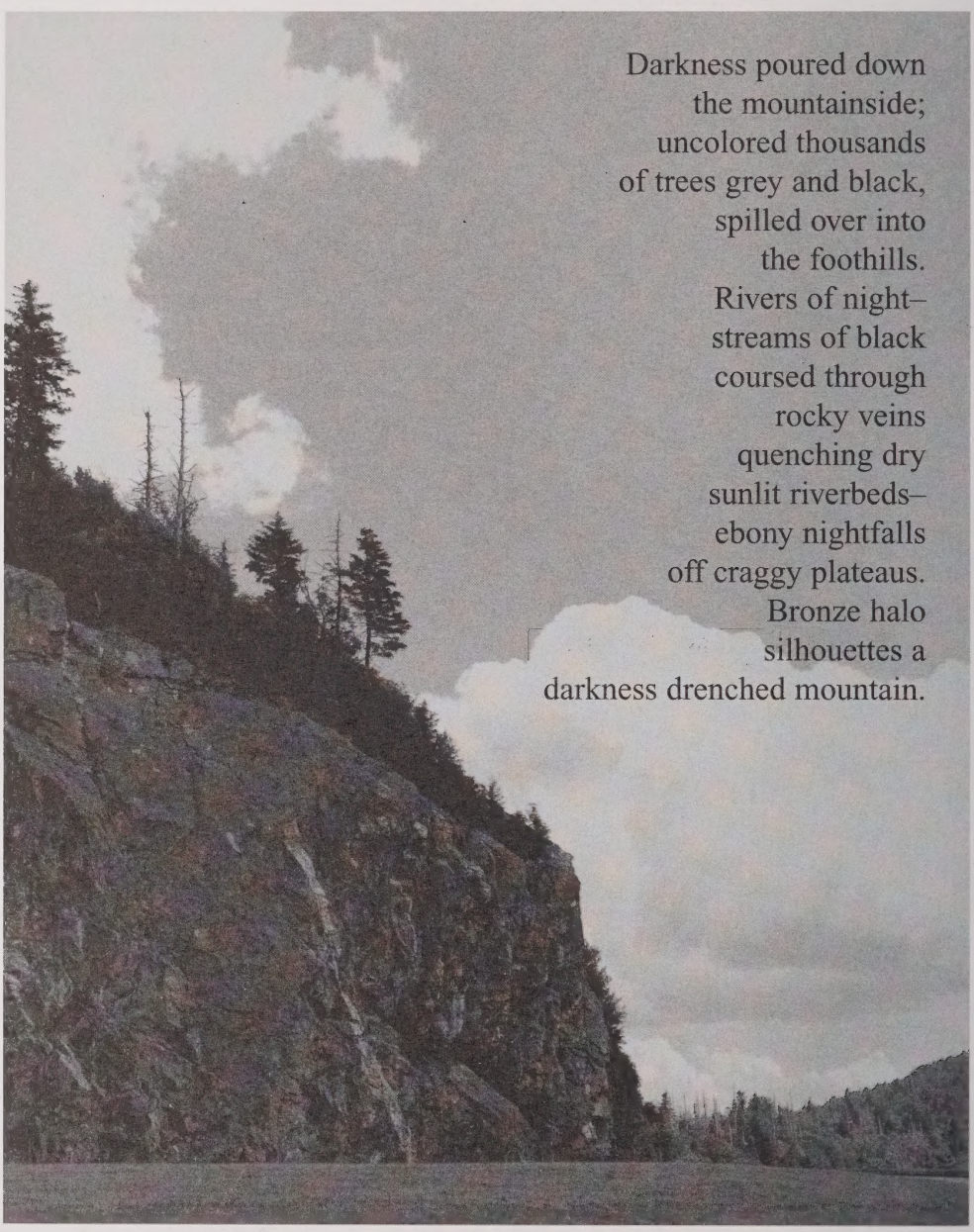


Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin



Westwindow

Will Hooper



Darkness poured down
the mountainside;
uncolored thousands
of trees grey and black,
spilled over into
the foothills.
Rivers of night–
streams of black
coursed through
rocky veins
quenching dry
sunlit riverbeds–
ebony nightfalls
off craggy plateaus.
Bronze halo
silhouettes a
darkness drenched mountain.

Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin

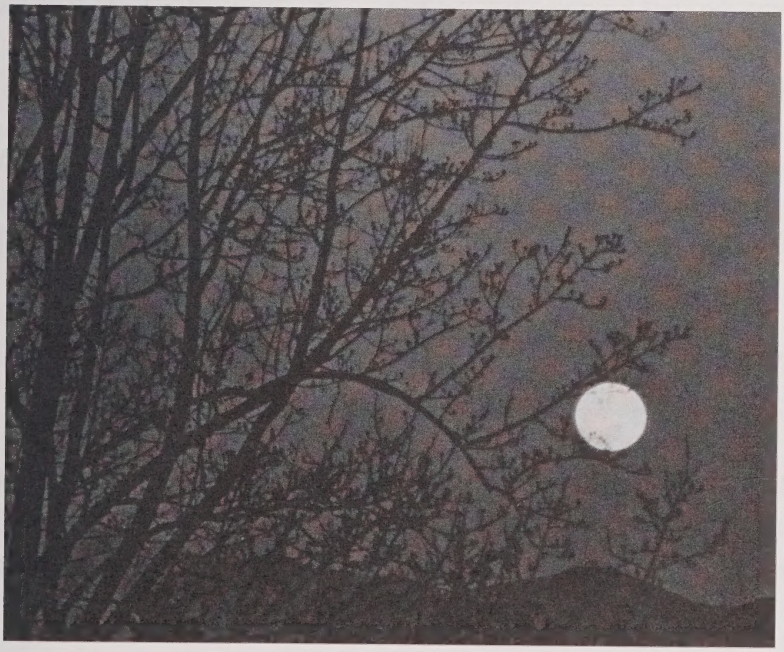
Vision

Will Hooper

Tell me tonight,
white moonshine with your parallel rays–
what and where
this awareness will be
in spacetime–tomorrow?
standing on red clay
or become clay itself?

That silent shimmering knowledge
whispered–an ivory reflection waves on water–
a fly wing on my cheek–
the yesterday-now-tomorrow–
simultaneous siblings
atop infinite wavecrests–and I–
a microcosm on a watercrust egg–
a water spider gliding the surface tension

The Future is a pressure wave preceding my arrival.



Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin

Get Lost: A Five Minute Screenplay

David Holcombe

FADE IN:

INT. A BUSINESS CLASS MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

ROB stands in front of a television screen which is showing a woman being taken from a suburban house by police.

SUPER: "FRIDAY."

COMMENTATOR (V.O.)
Vanessa Gray, called Van by her friends, was taken away from the home by police. Police were careful to point out that she was not under arrest.

Rob sits on the edge of the bed and opens a briefcase as he listens:

COMMENTATOR (V.O.)
Police report receiving a cell phone from Dr. Gray saying that he had a head injury and had been locked in the trunk of his wife's car. Dr. Gray believed he was being murdered.

Rob opens the briefcase and takes out a laptop, attaches it to the internet port on the desk, opens it and pulls up a website as he listens. On the screen the police can be seen searching the trunk of a late model Honda.

COMMENTATOR (V.O.)
When police arrived at the house last night, Mrs. Gray was at home and her car was in the garage.

Rob puts a coded number into the search option on the Swissbanque website and pulls up a balance of $2,298,456 as he continues to listen:

COMMENTATOR (V.O.)
Police report that Dr. Gray's belongings had been packed in boxes in the bedroom, but that not even his personal items like shaving kits and vitamins were missing. Gray, shown here in a recent photograph, has not been found.

The screen shows Rob with a mustache, sideburns, and darker, longer hair, wearing glasses.

Rob walks to the front of the screen and looks at his picture on the screen and at himself in the mirror beside the television. His new grooming makes him look younger and sharp. He smiles as he continues to listen:

COMMENTATOR (V.O.)
Police report finding blood in the trunk of Mrs. Gray's car, and are planning to test for DNA. Mrs. Gray's alleged boyfriend has also been picked up . . .

CUT TO:

ROB AND VANESSA'S GARAGE - NIGHT.

SUPER: "THE DAY BEFORE - THURSDAY"

Rob comes into the garage carrying a bag of trash.

ROB
(over his shoulder, into the house)
I'm putting out the trash!

VANESSA (O.S.)
(from inside the house)
Yeah, yeah!

Rob puts the bag down beside the trash can, and then opens the trunk of the Honda. He lifts the carpet and takes out a clear Ziploc bag containing a large culinary knife. He takes a pair of latex gloves out of his pocket and puts them on. Rob takes a new blood sample syringe out of his

doctor's bag which is in the trunk. He then correctly draws blood from his left arm. He uses the needle to put blood onto the knife in the bag, closes the bag, and then places it in the bottom of the empty trash can–placing the bag of trash on top of it.

VANESSA (O.S.)
(from the house)
You going to stay out there all night?

ROB
(smiling)
No!

Rob puts the rest of the blood from the syringe on the gloves and then smears the blood around the trunk on the right side and around the back of the lip of the opening.

ROB
I'm just tidying up.

Rob disassembles the syringe and puts it back in its cardboard box, then takes off his left glove, leaving the syringe and box inside. Then he takes off his right glove leaving the left glove and box inside and then places them in his pant pocket. He picks up the briefcase and his cell phone from the trunk and quietly closes the car trunk, leaving his doctor's bag inside.

Rob walks out of the garage leaving the light on and the door open. He dials 911 on the phone.

ROB
(as he disappears into the dark woods behind the house)
Hello? 911? Get me the police.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DMV - DAY.

SUPER: "WEDNESDAY"

Rob comes out looking at his new driver's license.

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP - ROB'S NEW DRIVER'S LICENSE AND NAME

CUT TO:

EXT. RENTAL CAR AGENCY - DAY

Rob comes out of the agency office walks to a car carrying a key and gets in, with the rental car agreement in his hand, along with a briefcase. Rob unlocks the car, gets in, and drives out of the lot in the rental car.

CUT TO:

INT. RENTAL CAR - DAY

On the seat beside Rob are a rental car agreement, a birth certificate, a Social Security card, a college diploma, a resume, and other identifying papers. All the documents bear his new name. Also on the seat are his laptop, cell phone, and a smart briefcase.

CUT TO:

EXT. SHOPPING MALL - DAY.

Rob comes out of the mall carrying shopping bags, clothes on hangers in store bags, and luggage. He opens the trunk and places the items inside alongside other items: new shoes in boxes, hats, ties, underwear in packages, toiletry items, etc.

DISSOLVE TO:

LAPTOP COMPUTER SCREEN

SUPER: "TUESDAY"

On the screen is the Swissbangue web page. "Transfer complete" appears on the screen. The Swissbanque page is exited. "www.idanew.com" is typed into the search option. The "Identity ANEW" web page appears. On the page is "How to get real IDs, birth certificates, social security, driver's license, credit cards, diplomas, all new verifiable documents for your new identity."

CUT TO:

CEMETARY - DAY.
Rob walks among the tombstones, looking for something. He kneels down and brushes grass clippings from a small stone set flat in the ground. The stone reads "Austin Bryan Miller, Born November 2, 1956, Died May 24,1957"–the name and birth date seen on Rob's new identity documents.

DISSOLVE TO:

THE KITCHEN IN ROB AND VANESSA'S HOUSE - NIGHT.

SUPER: "MONDAY"

Rob is wearing yellow dishwashing gloves while he washes pots and pans from dinner preparation. VANESSA is at the counter chopping vegetables for a salad with the large culinary knife.

VANESSA
Soooo, basically, that's it. I know that you've known, how could you not know?

ROB
How would I know?

Vanessa puts down the knife and carries the salads to the dining room.

VANESSA (O.S.)
Don't be a jerk! It's over, and that's it.

Vanessa comes back in and gets the already filled dinner plates and returns to the dining room as she SPEAKS:

VANESSA

I'm packing your stuff this week, and I expect you to be out of the house on Saturday.

ROB

(finishing the dishes)

So you can move your new boyfriend in on Sunday?

Vanessa comes in and pours two glasses of white wine.

VANESSA

Can we be a little civilized here?

ROB

Sure, just like Noel Coward.

Vanessa takes the two glasses into the dining room.

VANESSA (O.S.)

I'd rather spend the rest of my life in jail than to spend one more week with you. So after Friday, you can just get lost!

Rob gets out a large Ziplock bag, carefully picks up the culinary knife from the counter, and places it in the bag. He smiles as he holds the bag up by the corner, looking at it.

ROB

Whatever.

FADE TO BLACK.

Etching by Shirley McLaughlin

Winter Snakes

Randee Goodstadt

Two little silver snakes curled up
On a low-growing lavender plant:
It's Jan. 4, 2004
And although it's January, it's 65 degrees.

Yet they appear to sleep
Enjoying the warmth
Maybe enjoying the pungent
Sweetness of lavender?

Imagine a snake
Having preferences:
Choosing lavender rather
Than tarragon or rosemary.

What kind of snakes are silver when small?
I've never seen this kind before,
Although I'm always glad
To see snakes in my garden.

I leave them be,
After stroking their scales, such a smooth feel!
Let them sleep, enjoy the sun and the lavender
While I go about my way.

(Author's Note: I easily discovered, thanks to the wonder of Google and the Internet, that these were probably Earth Snakes, and that field biologists are uncertain of their precise range because they aren't often seen. In devotion to science, I sent an email to the biologist who posted that information, telling him of my sighting.)

México, Mi Amor

Richard J. DeLuca

Five-thirty. I was headed home on the interstate when traffic suddenly slowed to less than thirty miles an hour. Drivers began to pump their brakes and angle onto the shoulder to avoid rear-end collisions. Everyone seemed to be as distracted as I was by the scarlet and indigo striped sunset.

I cracked the sunroof and turned on NPR. *All Things Considered.* A report about an exhibit at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington caught my attention. Conceived and presented by Guillermo Gómez Peña, a Mexican-born artist. I turned up the volume.

The Temple of Confessions. Mexicans on display for American museum-goers to ogle and confess to.

"I display myself with my colleagues as a human artifact, as a cultural specimen inside of a plexiglass box. And I am a de facto piece of art," explained Gómez Peña.

"My God, this is wonderful!" I said out loud, as I listened to his lilting pronunciation.

"One of our many characters is the Mexterminator...who beats up border patrolmen and Los Angeles cops...who seduces blonde women, who infects English language with Spanish."

Gómez Peña went on to describe some of the other Mexican stereotypes represented in his *tableau vivant*: Sampocho Aztlaneca, a curio shop shaman for spiritual tourists, the pre-Colombian *vato*, a kind of holy gang member.

"And there are kneelers in front of this human artifact, and people can kneel in front of us and confess into a mike."

The altered voice of each confessor had an eerie resonance, as if it were the soul's own voice revealing its deep fear and secret hatred of Mexicans. Fear and hatred. According to Gómez Peña, "People are no longer willing to work out the complexities of intercultural and interracial relations." Of course not. Fear and hatred are easier.

What would I confess, if I were kneeling in front of this living diorama? I asked myself. How could I describe my lifelong love affair with Mexico?

•••

Traffic was thinning as my taxi circled the Monument to Independence and began working its way to the outside lane in anticipation of a right turn at Calle Amberes. I looked up at *el Angel*, her golden wings extended, a triumphal wreath in her raised right hand, a length of broken chain in her left.

When I first saw it twenty-seven years earlier, the statue of winged victory stood crated and waiting to be returned to its position above Paseo de la Reforma. During the earthquake of 1957, the year before, *el Angel* had toppled from its one-hundred-thirty-foot column, prompting *capitalinos* to refer to it as the *fallen angel*. Perhaps it was also emblematic of the rise and fall of Mexico's fortunes.

My taxi turned right into Calle Hamburgo, struggling through the congested, narrow street, past turn-of-the-century mansions hidden by walls topped with broken glass, past boutiques, jewelry stores, antique shops, a bookstore and flower vendors.

Familiar smells. Diesel fumes, wet paving stones, ripe papayas, meat cooking over charcoal. The burnt coffee aroma of a Delicado. And the soul-satisying smell of tortillas baking on a *comal*.

Familiar sounds. The unnerving rasp of worn brake shoes, a few bars of a *cumbia*, the whisper of bundled twigs sweeping the sidewalk. And empty green glass bottles clanging like ships' bells in their metal cradles, as an ancient truck heaves and gasps from restaurant to restaurant delivering water.

Then the lobby of the Galería Plaza. Slivers of conversations.

"*Ándale, pues. Nos vemos mañana.*"

"*Víctor Martínez para servirle.*"

"*...parece que no hay remedio.*"

"*Francamente no sé qué decirte, pero...*"

And then, "*Bienvenido, señor de Luca.*"

México. *La capital*. Home at last.

Follow Your Heart

Donna Helen Crisp

A heart opens out of fear or surrender.
Because sometimes it is easier to love than to hate.
Because life goes by in a second
and love counts high on eternity's list.

A heart closes out of fear or ego.
Because sometimes it is too hard to love.
Because *fairness* shouts "no"
and there is no eternity inside despair.

A heart bends and breaks and mends and heals
and scar tissue can yield strength
for love to begin its journey inside *us*
and then *love is all there is*, into forever.

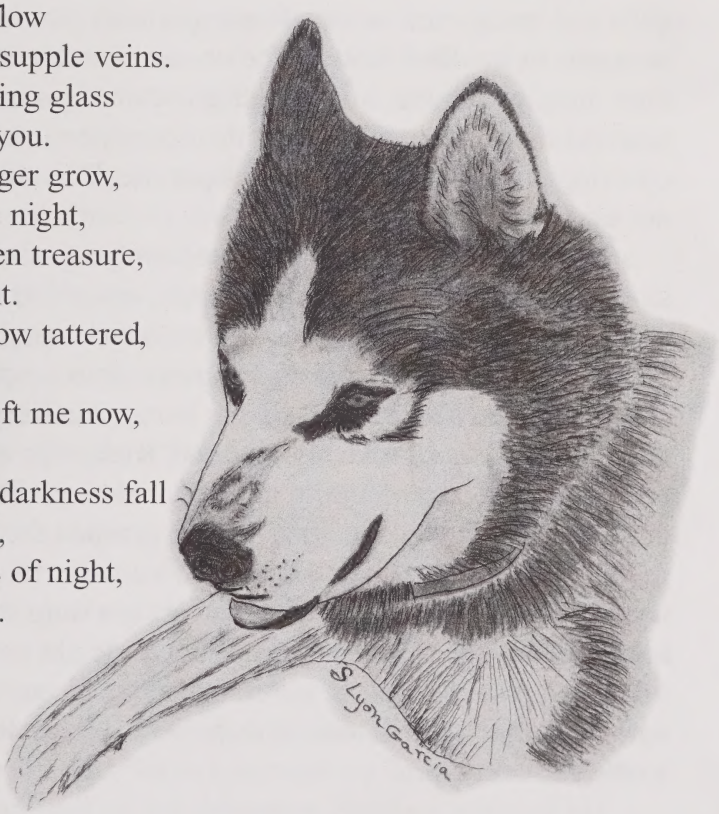
A heart opens or closes out of fear
because sometimes we welcome the unknown
and sometimes we cannot get out of our own way
and love anoints us or leaves us alone.

This life is a tiny moment
expanded by love or contracted in sorrow.
May we all use our suffering
to guide us into eternity's loving arms.

Untitled

Joe Allawos

sitting sheltered in your arms,
to dream a dream of openness.
please sit still, my looking glass,
sit still and let me see.
an openness so rare, so fine,
so flowing like I've never known
but an openness, you say,
that I shall never, ever own.
with wind the witness, river's guide,
just give to me my simple vice;
inebriate me, looking glass,
medicate me, make me wise.
give in, let me live to know,
just how powerful the flow
that courses thru those supple veins.
please sit still, my looking glass
and let me look inside you.
and as the shadows longer grow,
and longer still towards night,
you leave me but a token treasure,
before you take to flight.
the canvas of my sail now tattered,
my rudder all askew,
my looking glass has left me now,
I've nothing left to do,
but wait and watch the darkness fall
and watch the river roll,
and wish upon the stars of night,
my looking glass's soul.



Drawing by Shirley Lyon Garcia

A Possum Named Saddam
Dec. 13, 2003

Chris Tibbetts

The hiss came unexpectedly, raspy and threatening, at odds with the cumbersome appearance of the creature. My instinctual panic at the sight of the razor-edged pointy teeth was not at all justified–he was my captive. As the middle-of-the-night quiet descended again, I contemplated what to do with the creature before me. Through the cat carrier's metal grate, we watched each other closely, evaluating the other's potential to do bodily harm. I meant him no harm, but he couldn't know that.

Yet again, as he had many nights before, the possum had interrupted my slumber with his ungraceful clambering through the kitty door and the click-click of his clawed feet on the wood floor. His destination? My cats' food bowls. Crunching the kibble with a volume unknown to more subtle feline gourmands, he would eat quickly, oblivious to my curious cats forming a wary semi-circle around the stranger. At my first footfall, the possum would always run back to the kitty door, giving me only a brief glimpse of his long, whip-like tail as he scurried through the opening in the door, the violent flap of the plastic covering punctuating his abrupt departure. This time, though, he would not escape–I had a plan!

The next time I heard the possum's signature clicking, I rose slowly so as not to make the bed creak, tiptoed to the kitty door, and quickly slid the cover down over the plastic flap, thereby preventing the possum's escape. The animal's instinct was to run, and run he did–around and around the house, with a crazy human chasing him, broom in hand. All the commotion woke my husband, Rick, who came shuffling sleepily from the bedroom, squinting to make meaning of the scene without the aid of his contact lenses. Once he had grasped the situation, he came to my aid by trying to block the possum's escape, like a sleepy soccer goalie trying to block a penalty kick. The cats too were dashing about to find hiding places, alarmed by the unusual midnight ruckus. During a brief lull in the proceedings, as we tried to shoo the possum out from under the sofa, Rick said, with a tone of disbelief, "You realize we're living a southern stereotype?"

Eventually we corralled the creature in the bathroom, pulling the door shut behind the captive. I wanted to immediately carry out the "capture and release" plan I had formulated, but my husband vehemently disagreed, saying it could wait until the morning. Rick, normally a very sweet and generous man during daytime hours, could be quite cranky if roused from his sleep, so I gave in, agreeing the "release" part of the plan could wait a few hours. As we tucked ourselves back under the quilts, I jokingly named our animal prisoner "Saddam"; news of the Iraqi dictator's capture had been flooding news reports all day.

Our Saddam had an enormous appetite. He was very fond of cat food–in all its forms. Did I mention that the cats' litter box is in the bathroom? From the darkness of the bedroom I listened to the scratching and crunching of the excavation, imagining with horror the midnight snacking. Surely the Geneva Convention has some guideline against such rations, no matter how nutritious? My resolve mounted as I again got out of bed. My husband remained still on his side of the bed, pretending to sleep. Despite my squeamishness, I decided I could handle this myself.

Retrieving the cat carrier from the basement caused my cats to panic and run for cover a second time. As I reassured them by cooing, "no, don't worry, no midnight vet visits for you," I eased open the bathroom door just a bit, and placed the carrier's open side at the door, allowing no exit except into the receptacle itself. The animal came dashing out, only to be confined in the cubicle. I slammed shut the carrier door with a gleeful bang and a yelled out to my husband in the bedroom, "We got him!" No reply came from him other than an exasperated sigh. Poor guy; it was hard enough living with an insomniac wife, without adding the complication of a nocturnal wild animal.

My curiosity got the better of me, and I decided to look a little more closely, as the only possums I had seen up to now had been road kill. I turned on the hallway light and peered into the carrier. My captive was a pretty big specimen, having gorged himself nightly at my expense for a month. He had a cute face, with beady dark eyes sitting atop his long pointed muzzle, capped with a pink, wiggling nose. His plush fur featured multiple shades of grey with a white undercoat. I was amazed at the feet–each pink toe was fully jointed. I moved in closer for a look at his amazingly long claws...mistake! My impression of him as cute changed in a millisecond at his fierce hiss, reeking of litter box breath. Now that his captor appeared on the defensive, Saddam initiated his

escape attempt, trying to dig his way through the plastic of the carrier. Seeing the possum's claws frantically prying through the air holes of the carrier, I decided that now was the time for action, not nature study.

I barged into the bedroom, where my beloved was just drifting off to sleepy land again. So much for independence: "Honey, we need to take Saddam to Beaver Lake, now!"

"Not now–it's the middle of the night! We'll take him in the morning."

"But he's so frightened in the carrier that he's trying to dig his way out."

"I really need my sleep; just put the carrier on the porch."

"But it's below freezing out there–he'll be cold and have no way to burrow!"

"He's an animal!"

"Fine! I'll take care of it myself!" was my petulant response.

"Mmmph...," was his reply.

This is the type of adventure that surely tests spousal patience. Fully awake, I put my coat on over my pajamas and slipped on some shoes and socks. Lugging the carrier containing what must have been 15 pounds of possum weight outside, I looked at the car, ruefully contemplating a trip across town to Beaver Lake. Cold, tired, and frustrated, I decided to alter my plan slightly. I turned my back on the car and walked to the normally traffic-filled Five Points intersection. At this time of night the street was eerily still and quiet, the red and green stoplights changing for the benefit of a lone pedestrian and her captive. I crossed the street to the grassy bank on the opposite side, my goal the wooded area underneath the small overpass. There was a streambed that ran through the area–a good home for a possum, I thought.

Without ceremony, I opened the cage door. The creature, scared of the unknown, remained in his confined space. I tipped the carrier slightly, letting gravity do its work. The possum ran down into the ravine created by the streambed, and then, once he had reached the bottom, stopped abruptly. "Just getting his bearings," I mused. Just as suddenly, however, he turned on a dime, and ran just as fast up the hill, past me and the carrier I ineffectually placed in his path, across the street, heading toward my house! I just stood there with my mouth open in dismay and disbelief, a failed liberator. All that middle-of-the-night drama for nothing!

I dejectedly made my way back inside; my husband, shoes on and contacts in, queried, "Where did you go? Let's get this over with..."

"I already let him loose."

"Why didn't you wait for me? Where?" Purposely ignoring the first question, I replied to the second, "Across the street."

"Across the street?! That's like capturing Saddam Hussein and letting him go in Iraq!" I considered explaining why his analogy wasn't an entirely correct one, what with the whole Sunni/Shiite Muslim thing, but reconsidered; it could wait until morning after all!

Two-color wood engraving by Lauren Faulkenberry

Asheville, Rose Byrne, and the "Golden Age"

Joe Franklin

On Monday, October 27, 1902, St. Agnes Catholic Church was crowded with friends and colleagues of one of Brooklyn's greatest doctors. Members of the Brooklyn Medical Society, the Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn, St. Mary's Ladies Aid Society, and the staff of Long Island Medical Hospital attended the solemn requiem high mass. The entire staff of St. Mary's hospital served as honorary pallbearers for John Byrne.

Conspicuously missing from the service were Dr. Byrne's wife, Mary Winifred, and two daughters, Evelyn and Rose. The family's old menace would not relinquish its grip, not even for his funeral. At the time of Dr. Byrne's death, Rose was so sick that Mrs. Byrne and Evelyn remained in Europe with Rose while Dr. Byrne's body was shipped backed to Brooklyn for the funeral. Their decision not to attend the service fueled speculation about Rose's condition and the health of the remaining Byrne family. Their absence contributed to the sadness over Dr. Byrne's passing and his family's struggle with tuberculosis.

John Byrne died suddenly of heart disease in Montreux, Switzerland, on Wednesday, October 1. He had addressed the International Obstetrical Congress on September 18 concerning new methods of fighting cancer. At age 72, Dr. Byrne was considered an authority on the treatment of uterine cancer and his remarks were enthusiastically received by members of the Congress. The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* covered his passing with bold headlines befitting a celebrity or a great scientist. Indeed, John Byrne had become something of a hero to the people of Brooklyn and a respected colleague in the medical community. A friend said that he died of worry. Others said that melancholy hastened his death.

On Saturday, February 15, 1902, Dr. Byrne, his wife and two daughters left Brooklyn for an extended tour of Europe. Publicly, the reason for this trip was rest and relaxation. Dr. Byrne planned to visit some of the great medical institutions of Europe. The winter would be spent in Paris with tours of Ireland, England and Germany. However, the real reason for the trip was known to almost everyone in Brooklyn.

By early 1902, the Byrnes had witnessed the illness, death, funeral and burial of eleven children. The most recent loss was Mary Winifred (named after her mother). She died on January 16, 1902. Her

death followed closely the death of Dr. Byrne's sole surviving son, John Dever Byrne, June 16, 1901. The cause of death for both adult children was tuberculosis.

Following Mary Winifred's death, the *Eagle* ran a story, "Seventh Child is Dead: Despite All Precautions. Consumption Claims Another Victim in Family of Dr. John Byrne." Although the *Eagle* had treated Dr. Byrne and his family with utmost respect, this particular story seemed to cross the line of professional journalism. Dr. Byrne was no stranger to the public spotlight. The *Eagle* frequently carried stories about the notable surgeon-in-chief of St. Mary's Hospital and his many accomplishments. However, the cause of Mary's death, or for that matter, the deaths of his other children, was a private matter, and Dr. Byrne went to great lengths to keep it so.

Nevertheless, the *Eagle* could not ignore the mounting tragedy that afflicted the Byrne family. The cause of Mary Winifred's death was publicly attributed to consumption. It was most ironic that a prominent Brooklyn physician could not isolate the cause of this disease or protect his remaining children from its onslaught. Further, Dr. and Mrs. Byrne had reportedly searched their genealogies for traces of the disease, but no evidence of a familial connection could be found.

Not only grief stricken by Mary Winifred's death, Dr. Byrne was also burdened by the public interest created by news of another family tragedy. The stigma of tuberculosis made many families recoil from public scrutiny, but for a leading physician to lose most of his children by this dreaded disease challenged his professional integrity. Certainly this well-known physician would lose the confidence of his patients, not to mention what his colleagues might think, if he couldn't control the menace of consumption in his own home.

If anyone could protect his family from tuberculosis, it would be John Byrne. His insistence on sanitary clinical practice and his systematic methods of treatment offered the Byrne children every defense available. Further, he had more than adequate financial resources and contacts with the finest doctors in Brooklyn. He was in a position to benefit from the latest and most efficacious diagnostic techniques. All of this, however, was to no avail.

As expected, the *Eagle*'s account of Mary Winifred's death did not sit well with the Byrne family. Although it is not known what transpired between Dr. Byrne and the *Eagle* staff after the story of Mary's death, the next day, the paper printed an apologetic retraction with the headline:

"Death of Miss Mary Byrne: Consumption Not the Cause of Seven Deaths in the Family."

The *Eagle* made every effort to repair the damage to Dr. Byrne's reputation and his broken heart. "Some erroneous reports as to the cause of Miss Byrne's death have been published, it being stated that she died of consumption. This is not the case, nor has it been the case with regard to the deaths of seven members of Dr. Byrne's family. It is true that there have been cases of tuberculosis in the family, but Miss Byrne (Mary Winifred) was not afflicted with that disease and the surviving members of the family are in perfect health."

Unfortunately, the retraction made matters worse. The overt attempt to deny the cause of death simply fueled speculation about the relentless siege of tuberculosis. By now, the damage had been done and many friends and observers were concerned about Dr. Byrne's welfare.

The growing spotlight only added to Dr. Byrne's mental exhaustion. On Friday, February 14, Dr. Byrne said he would close his residence at 314 Clinton Street and take his family to Europe. Tickets were purchased for the steamship *Minneapolis* of the Atlantic Transport Company.

The aging doctor announced plans to continue his medical practice after the extended trip to Europe, but in a limited capacity. He would change his residence, too. By now, he probably suspected contamination at his home. Perhaps he would move to Manhattan on his return, as was the talk among friends and colleagues.

News of Dr. Byrne's intentions to leave for Europe reverberated through the medical community. Friends and family were sympathetic to the Byrne family tragedies and saddened to see them leave. Colleagues at St. Mary's Hospital arranged to honor their surgeon-in-chief with a reception at the Crescent Club at 5 p.m. on February 14. Many physicians from across Brooklyn attended the event and offered farewell gifts for their beloved colleague and his family.

The next day, a large crowd met at the steamer's dock to wish the Byrnes farewell. It was reported that gifts and floral arrangements covered the state rooms. Although Dr. Byrne said the trip was for "a respite" from his many years of labor as a physician, he and Mrs. Byrne were now worried about their younger daughter, Rose, who was showing signs of the same disease that afflicted her brothers and sisters. The Byrnes left at 10 a.m. on Saturday, February 15, to seek "new surroundings and an entire change of life."

Dr. and Mrs. Byrne demonstrated remarkable strength despite the death of eleven children. They conducted affairs with dignity and humility. Following the death of each child, they dedicated themselves more fervently to the charitable work of healing.

An extended trip to Europe was not out of character for the Byrne family, but almost everyone knew that this trip would bring closure to the 50-year career of John Byrne. The city of Brooklyn would lose a great humanitarian and the medical community would feel his absence most keenly. Indeed, when the steamship Minneapolis set sail for Europe, John Byrne would say his final farewell to friends and colleagues. A few months later he would die suddenly in Switzerland.

Following Dr. Byrne's death, his daughter Rose eventually recovered and returned to the U.S. with her mother and sister. While Rose's condition improved, Evelyn became ill. Four years later, Evelyn, 33, died on Sunday, September 9, 1906. Predictably, the cause of her death was "pulmonary tuberculosis." Now, only Rose and her mother survived the once large family of fifteen.

Shortly after Evelyn's funeral, Mary and Rose moved to Asheville. "The Land of the Sky," described as a wonderful "plateau, diversified and irregular though it be, undulating between the shadows of the rippling Swannanoa to the base of sun tipped mountain crags, with numberless giant peaks as sentinels, rivals even the Rockies." The small mountain town had become a center for the treatment of tuberculosis. It was well known to Brooklynites who were searching for clear mountain air, clean water and a moderate climate. Many Asheville resorts were routinely advertised in the *Eagle*, including the Battery Park Hotel, the Kenilworth Inn and Mr. Vanderbilt's estate.

Many affluent people were drawn to Asheville for rehabilitation and found the scenic beauty, moderate climate and natural amenities to their liking. Consequently, Asheville noticed an influx of wealthy immigrants, those with enough financial resources to move to the city and build homes and businesses. Some of the nation's finest doctors made Asheville their home, including C. V. Reynolds, Westray Battle, W. L. Dunn and others.

After staying at the Ridgeway Boarding House (currently the site of St. Joseph's Hospital), Rose and her mother moved to Milfoil Cottage in Albemarle Park. This picturesque community was the vision of Thomas Wadley Raoul. He, too, was in poor health and moved to Asheville to recover. While here, he converted the family farm on Charlotte Street to a famous development.

News of Mr. Raoul's community traveled quickly to Brooklyn. In 1899, the *Eagle* featured the southern resort: "One of the most notable achievements of Asheville attractions is the opening of the Manor Resort Inn and cottages, erected by the Albemarle Park Company. The park contains thirty-four acres and extends from Asheville suburbs to points in the mountain beyond Sunset Drive. B. L. Gilbert of New York is the architect. The new resort may be reached via the Southern Railroad, which touches at all the attractive resorts of the South. Asheville is one of the most popular of the Southern Railroad's numerous winter resorts."

Soon Rose and her mother developed a wide circle of friends in Asheville. Among them, Amy Colyer would become their closest. Amy was the daughter of landscape architect Charles Thomas Colyer. Amy and Rose were both daughters of distinguished fathers and they enjoyed each other's company.

Seven years after Rose arrived in Asheville, she suffered another loss. Mary Winifred Byrne, 72, died on Wednesday, February 19, 1913, at Milfoil Cottage. Mary's physician, Dr. W. L. Dunn, an Asheville surgeon and tuberculosis specialist, attributed her death to uremia (kidney failure). Mrs. Byrne's body was sent to Brooklyn, accompanied by Rose, for interment in the family plot at Holy Cross Cemetery. A requiem mass was celebrated, February 22, at 10:30 a.m., St. Agnes Church. Like other members of the Byrne family, no marker was erected to her memory.

After her mother's funeral, Rose Byrne returned to Asheville and purchased a tract of land from Thomas Wadley Raoul. The property was located on Macon Avenue. Miss Byrne's neighbors were Dr. C. V. Reynolds to the southwest, and the Asheville Country Club (currently the Grove Park Golf Course) to the north-east. Edwin W. Grove's new resort, under construction, was only a short walk up the street. Her newly acquired property was adorned with dogwood, rhododendron, wild azalea and redbud. Part of the land was forested with hardwood trees including oak and maple. The slope of the property, or the "precipitous declivity" as some called it, provided wonderful views of the winter sunset.

Rose contracted Charles N. Parker to design the cottages for her newly acquired property. His brother, Harry Parker, designed the roads and driveways. Unfortunately, Rose would not live to see the Parker brothers' most noted project, the Grove Arcade in downtown Asheville. Harry Parker was E. W. Grove's manager of investments and engineering. He prepared the site plans for the huge arcade project. His brother Charles was the architect.

Rose immediately (in 1913) built two cottages near Macon Avenue: "Rosemary" and "Primrose." She established residency in "Rosemary" and rented "Primrose." Approximately two years later, Rose expanded her real estate investment with three additional cottages: "Rambler," "Westview" and "Blossoms." A sixth cottage, "Violet," was added by 1920. Each cottage included a sleeping porch for tubercular tenants. Rose enjoyed several wonderful years in the Sunset Terrace community.

During the summer months of 1924, Rose and Amy rented a cottage in Highlands, North Carolina. Just as her father sought healthy destinations for the Byrne children when illness threatened, Rose found Highlands to be the ideal retreat, given her declining health. Not only was it near Asheville, Highlands also offered high altitude, clean air and many opportunities for outdoor exercise.

On Sunday, July 27, Rose became gravely ill. Dr. H. P. P. Thompson attended Rose from Monday until she died at 12:15 p.m., Tuesday, July 29. She slipped into a coma and diabetes finally claimed her weakened body at age 44. Amy was by her side. Although Rose lived longer than any Byrne sibling, her life was also cut short by disease. No surviving relatives remained.

Rose Byrne's body was transported to Asheville by truck and then to Brooklyn by train. She is interred in the family plot in Holy Cross Cemetery. Her grave lies in a section called, "Front of the Chapel," Range 10, Plot 111.

Thirteen members of the Byrne family are buried at Holy Cross Cemetery in the large plot acquired by Dr. Byrne in May 1880. The burial plot is conspicuous by the absence of individual grave markers. Two modest, surface-mounted markers offer tribute to the entire family. The first marker, approximately 8 by 11 inches, simply reads, "Dr. Byrne." The other marker, of the same size, is inscribed, "No. 109 to 112, S. 10."

The only monument in Asheville attributable to Rose Byrne or any of her family is in St. Lawrence Basilica–an elegant six-foot statue of St. Rose of Lima in the church proper. The statue was given to St. Lawrence Church by Rose at the dedication of the Church in 1909. Church records have little else to say about Rose Byrne or her mother.

Although her story is almost forgotten, her legacy lives on in the Basilica of St. Lawrence and the cottages of Sunset Terrace.

The Kiss

Julia Nunnally Duncan

On that warm November day at the North Carolina interstate rest stop, the man paced back and forth on the sidewalk. He wore beige cotton Dockers and a white long-sleeved shirt with the sleeves rolled to just below the elbows. His feet were bare.

Finally he went to a concrete picnic table under the Virginia pines and sat and clasped his hands.

He was quite good looking, Ursula thought as she watched him. He reminded her of Richard Chamberlain in *The Thorn Birds*: late forties, a neat professional type–maybe a college professor. His hair, more gray than dark blond, was cut neatly, yet long enough–just touching his collar–to make him pretty, almost effeminate. In fact, Ursula's first thought was that he was waiting for a male lover. She'd heard about such rest stop meetings between gay men.

One thing was certain: he was waiting, and he was anxious. The first to arrive to some scheduled tryst, he peered at the busy entrance ramp, checking his gold wrist watch often.

Ursula couldn't help but look at him as she chewed her Smithfield Barbeque sandwich, keeping her eye also on Olivia, her year-old baby who slept in a baby carrier that rested on top of the table, and on Glenn, her husband–their first trip as a threesome to Pine Knoll Shores on the North Carolina coast.

Yet the nervous man intrigued her enough to make her say to Glenn, "He's waiting for his lover." The man did, of course, wear a wedding band.

Glenn didn't respond, concentrating on his sandwich.

Suddenly the man rose and went to a red car, so quickly Ursula almost missed it.

The woman's car was parked a few yards away.

He went to her driver's side, to her rolled down window, and gave her a light kiss on the lips. Then she reached to unlock his passenger side door and he entered the car.

Five minutes hadn't passed until Ursula looked and to her amazement, he took the woman's face firmly in his hands and bent back her head and kissed her mouth.

Oh, Ursula thought, I'm witnessing a dark secret–perhaps one of many rendezvous for this couple–or was it the first real one?

He's left some workplace during his lunch hour to meet this woman, she concluded. Maybe they live in not-so-nearby Greensboro or Winston-Salem. Ursula knew he would not tell his wife how he had spent his lunch hour.

The woman was young–no surprise–maybe in her mid twenties, her blond hair pulled back in a perky ponytail and her car sporting a magnetic Jazzercize sign on its door, making Ursula assume the woman was an aerobics instructor. Oh, yes, this made sense: the firm thighs, the hard buttocks, and the stamina a mid-life lover would be in awe of. He would worship her on his knees. The sexual positions they might explore would bring tears to his eyes.

Ursula was distressed by her accidental voyeurism, aggravated by the past year's situation with Glenn: his late-hour obligations at work and the paralegal Pamela who frequently phoned their house on weekends to ask for Glenn and his haste to carry the portable phone outside on the deck to talk to her. How many times had she read in Glenn's face the lie he was covering up? *But I called you at the office, Glenn, and all I got was your voice mail. Why didn't you answer if you were there?* And more to the point, *Was someone there with you?* After all, his office couch was large enough to accommodate two . . . .

But despite her distress, Ursula watched the couple kiss, drank in the sight that was so private, yet so blatant, for any tourist to walk by and witness in this public area.

To see them fueled Ursula's fear that no marriage could stand the test of temptation. No one in light of such desire could tell the truth.

Honey, I swear I was there, Glenn said when she asked him. *Are you sure you called at that time? I could have been down the hall in the restroom.*

For an hour, Glenn? How embarrassing for her to admit she'd tried to call him for that long.

Ursula grieved for the man's wife, probably at some office herself or at home planning a dinner party. Perhaps tonight in bed he would evade her caresses, but in his way allow himself to touch her to quiet her doubts or his guilty conscience.

Ursula had first met Pamela at a Christmas party at Glenn's firm and had watched their shared smiles and the way they gravitated toward

each other the entire evening. But more disturbingly she noticed how little clusters of women watched Glenn and Pamela talking beside the refreshment table and then looked at her to see her response. That night she wanted Glenn to prove his desire for her. She wasn't really interested in sex so soon after Olivia's birth and couldn't help but keep part of her attention turned to the nursery. Still, she caressed Glenn, kissed his face, until he said, *You don't have to try so hard, Ursula.* Her face burned with shame and she wondered who Glenn was really thinking of when he turned the lamplight out and submitted to her. Surely the svelte Pamela was more desirable than she.

Why, Ursula asked now, as she watched the scene in the car, didn't this man simply divorce his wife to free himself for his mistress?

But she knew people tended sometimes to hold fiercely onto stability, hearth and home, while craving connection with another, more adored, figure. In Glenn's case there was Olivia to consider, though Glenn seemed to have only a perfunctory interest in their daughter. Born when Ursula was forty and Glenn forty-two, Olivia was more Ursula's dream come true than Glenn's.

She thought about President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Though he died in his mistress's arms, he had tenaciously stayed married to Eleanor. Ursula's father, who lived during the Depression, held FDR up as a model of benevolence and honor.

Now she watched the kiss–long, tender, the man's head moving, his mouth pressing deeper, deeper.

Ursula left the rest stop with a troubled heart. She had witnessed a crime, a betrayal, a murder of a sort. Something profoundly intimate, and she felt unclean.

But then as time passed, she found herself, mostly at night, recalling the way the man held the young woman's face in his hands–as if her face were sacred to touch.

And she thought of how the man had left the red car as quickly as he entered it. After he shut the door, he stood alone and stared as the woman sped onto the exit lane and into the busy interstate traffic.

Would anyone ever watch her leave with such pain in his face? Ursula wondered.

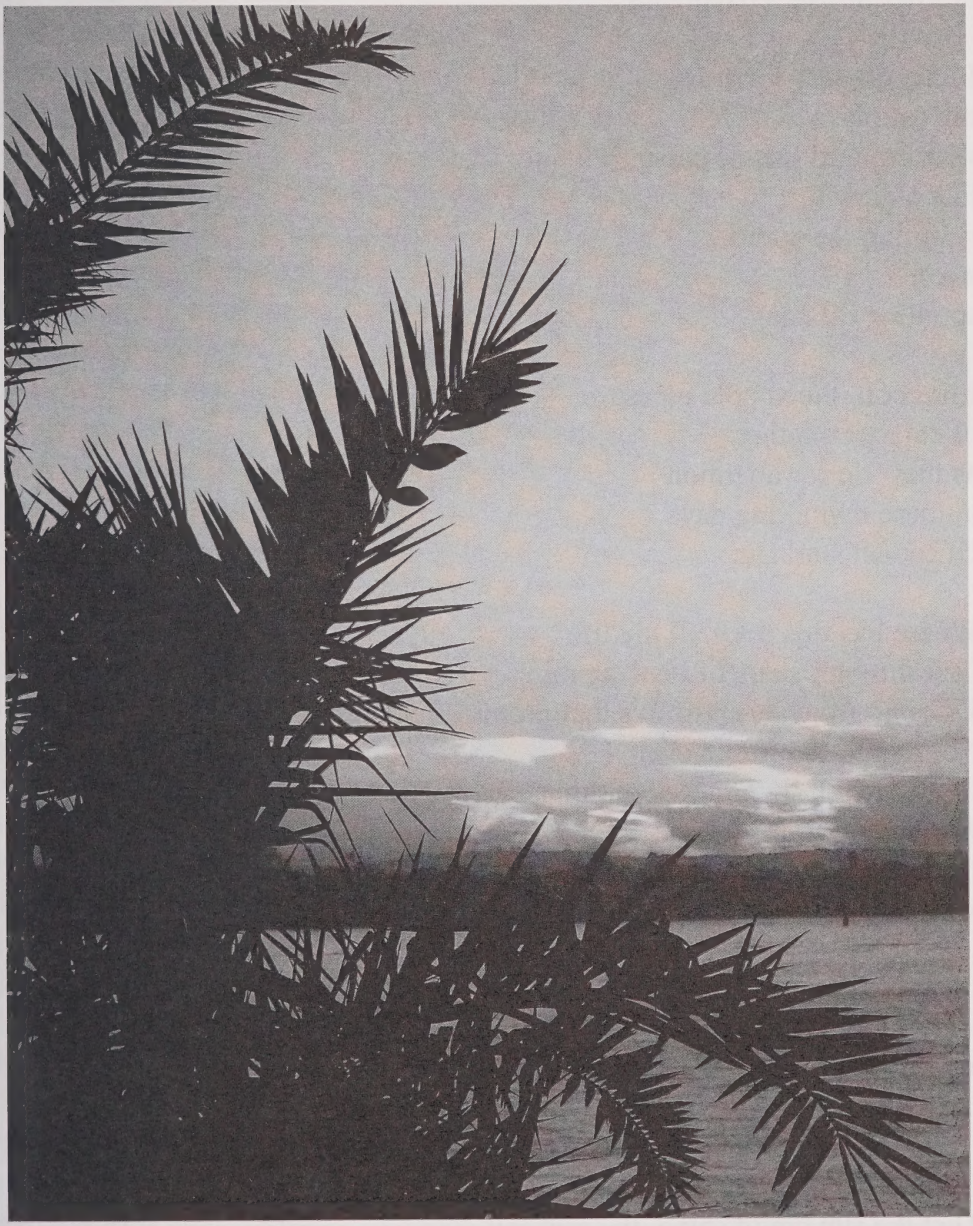
Only time would tell.

But in the meantime she lay in bed at night, Glenn turned away from her after another argument about Pamela. He had announced that

he and Pamela would be attending a legal conference together next month. *My God, Ursula, this is my job,* he said when she asked how he could do this to her.

In the darkness Ursula saw the man's face as the red car drove away. No words could explain the sadness in his eyes as if he thought he would never see his lover again.

Ursula thought about him until she fell asleep.



Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin

Seattle to North Carolina by way of memory
(How I found my way home in the darkness)

Amy Goodman-Bide

The living room door is open
Wind, ten stories high,
billows in like a daydream.

In the drapery tornado,
the cat plays
with confetti bits of paper
like a clown
warming the audience
a jester
soothing the king.

I linger in the simple pleasure
of cat and weather
as they vie for attention
in these dwindling days
Of Indian summer.

Where has this been all my life?
I sat through years of pouring rain
Through Augusts and Julys that promised no sweat, no pain
Nothing to reminisce over
in the late chilly hours of autumn
when the skin prickles
from a day spent in the sun
and sleep arrives like a gift.

I waded through lightless winters
with my face hidden in the neck of a sweater
and my heart like a stone in my gut.

I would have come running before.
If I had known,
That the sun could shine, the rain fall

Thunder and lightening burst upon
the sky as it cradles
blue tinted mountains
like foster children.

I would have come running.
Before the gray temptations
Of Prozac-laden bridges
And sinister cups of black coffee
Held me captive in the eye of The Needle,
Spinning, endlessly spinning, into the cold earth.

Here, in the surrendering afternoon light,
The horizon stretches like a border
I am the sentinel, poised on the porch
Observing the land for signs of change.
Birds of prey dip low to the ground
They whisper that death is easy
Efficient
That it beckons to mice
Like water beckons to the roots
of spreading dogwoods
Like sunlight beckons to the petals of a rose
the wings of a velvet butterfly
the curling nose of a cloud.

I sit comfortably
And listen for the old woman
I will become
For the image I saw as a child
The apex of choices I've made.
I wait for her to catch up with me,
And free her hair
Into the sweet, humid air
I've come to call home
Where crickets tune to an owl's call
Where the night creeps in on silent feet
And fireflies lick
my last forgotten breath.

Wives' Tales

Gabrielle Thompson

A storyteller is a transmitter of history, morality, and sociocultural standards. The storyteller weaves information into a format that teaches and reinforces universal commonalties; he/she is a bridge between cultural reality and the audience. Through stories, we discover how remarkably alike we are. As an anthropologist who became a librarian, I am charmed by stories and have taken great interest in the folklore and superstitions of the cultures where I have traveled and lived. I spent fourteen years aboard our schooner, Satori, in the Virgin Islands. My daughter, Lyric, was born there and was molded by that culture until we moved to North Carolina when she was seven. She is now nineteen and pursuing a degree at Chapel Hill in Communications, with a minor in Social and Economic Justice. Her West Indian background influenced a passion regarding civil rights. She plans to spend a semester in Ghana next fall focusing on human rights and to visit South Africa on another honors study program this summer. Some of the most interesting folklore I encountered in the islands was during my pregnancy with Lyric. West Indians love babies and are delighted to tell you everything they think you should know about having them.

At the marketplace in Charlotte Amalie, as I reached for guavas and genips to add to my basket already overflowing with juicy orange paw-paws, limes, and sweet figs, the native shop woman sporting a massive ochre-and-blue striped turban eyed my belly as she whacked off the top of a drinking coconut with her machete. She pushed the hairy orb toward me asking, "Dat a baby you makin' in deh, or you jus gettin' fat?"

I'd learned in my years in St. Thomas not to take offense at personal comments or questions. It wasn't meant as prying. Elders were supposed to give advice–to everyone. Smiling, I answered, "A baby. My first."

Her eyes widened. In her culture, a woman my age–pressing thirty-five–would be more likely to be a grandmother than an incipient mother. She again offered the coconut. "Drink. Dat be a strong child when de mama drink de milk of de coconut."

I knew better than to argue and drank the effervescent juice. I thanked her and asked what I owed for it and my basket of fruit. She handed me a bay branch, green and spicy, and told me to keep it in hand when I was at the market. She nodded behind me, where a very pregnant teenager stood buying sweet potato pies. It was bad luck to be around other pregnant women without greenery in hand, she said. Obviously, I knew nothing about being pregnant! She warned me against looking at "de cripples," anyone with a deformity, or my baby would share their fate. To sit cross-legged or lift my hands over my head would cause the umbilical cord to wrap around the unborn child's neck, strangling it before birth. (I didn't tell her I exercised each morning, including toe touches, and the baby was just fine. I'd seen the way she wielded a machete!) And, I should not touch any living animal, or my baby would be "twisted." My cat, which loved to purr herself to sleep on my belly, would not appreciate that tidbit. I knew not to empty the cat box while I was pregnant to prevent the remote chance of airborne infection from trichinosis (hey, it wouldn't hurt my husband to do it for nine months), but I kept all mention of my feline friend to myself. I'd heard the superstition stateside that a cat would steal a baby's breath, and knew that West Indians would be sure to believe the same.

"Doan take no tub," she warned me, "only showah."

I assured her I would follow her directive, easy enough to do since I lived on a boat which had only a shower. I did not ask her about my daily swim in the sea for fear it would also be verboten. As I handed her the money I owed her, she shook her head and lamented, "You owe de debil a day's wook."

It took me a minute before realization dawned and I asked, "Because I'm left-handed?"

She nodded, black eyes wide and solemn, inches from my blue ones.

"I know," I said with a sigh. "When I was a little girl, my teachers tried to make me write with my right hand, but I just couldn't manage it."

She commiserated with me. "When de baby come, make it sleep on de right side. Den it not be wrong-handed. Deh beat my daddy when he be small and tie his hand behind his back, but he still be wrong-handed."

Before I left the market, she warned me not to wear high heels (I owned only sandals) or my child would be cross-eyed. I should keep an open pair of scissors under my mattress to predispose an easy birth. I

didn't follow that advice and did have an extremely difficult time. The loss of five pints of blood almost caused my death, but that was more a result of poor hospital care than the difficult birth process.

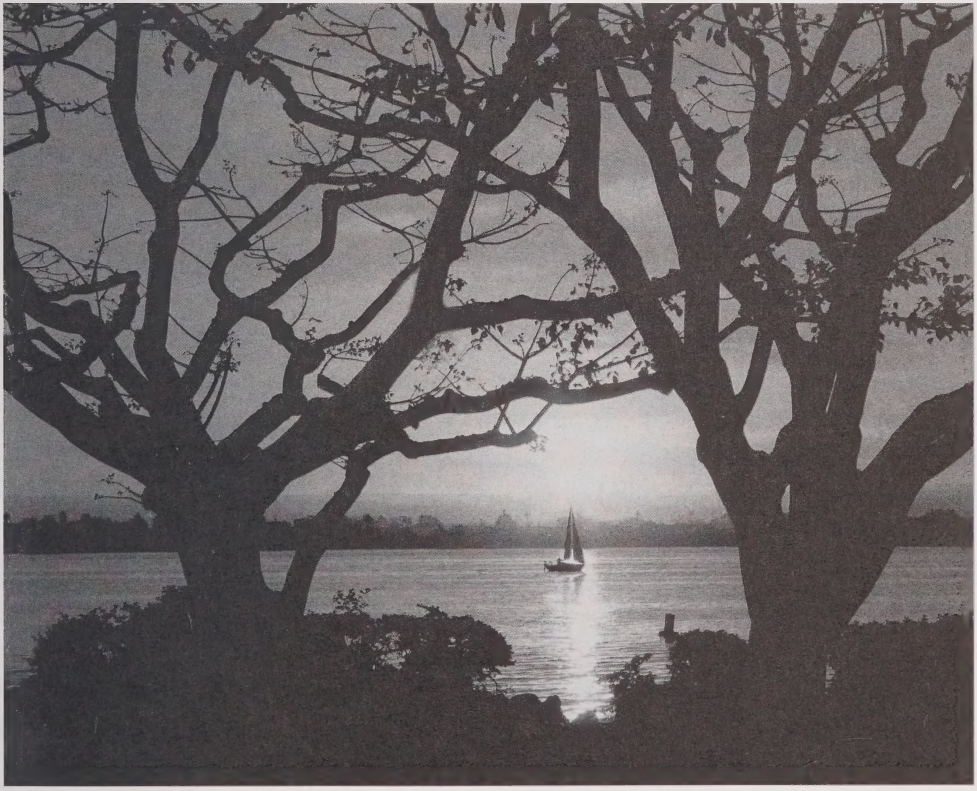
Being Irish, I comply with that culture's most basic superstition by carrying a four-leaf clover in my wallet for good luck. The foundation of that superstition lies with the first mother, Eve. Supposedly, the four-leaf clover is the only plant she carried on her departure from the Garden of Eden. And, according to folklore, the day she was banished with Adam was Friday the 13th, which was further jinxed when Jesus died on the same date. The negative impact of the number thirteen is manifested in another aspect of Christian lore. Thirteen at the dinner table causes one of the party to die before the year is out. Of course, the statistics were much worse for the thirteen at Jesus' final meal. In Leonardo da Vinci's painting of *The Last Supper*, notice that Judas has his hand up over his left shoulder as if he has thrown the salt that lies spilled on the table, another widely held superstition to thwart bad luck. Black cats earned a bad rap during the Inquisition as witches' familiars that could transport their mistresses' spirits to do evil deeds without detection. (I personally think the superior, aloof attitude the cat displays toward humans was to blame for the animosity that patriarchal society felt toward felines.) The fear of walking under a ladder also began in early Christian times, as it represented the breaking of the Trinity formed by the ladder leaning against the wall.

West Indians believe in ghosts, which are called jumbies. Necklaces of jumbie beads (red seeds with a black dot "eye") protect the wearer, and pennies on the eyes of the dead keep their spirits from leaking out. If you are crass enough to fall asleep on the night a loved one dies, that spirit will grab you by the big toe and pull your spirit out of your body, making you join the person in death. On Salt Island I asked Clementine why the graves had conch shell horns and rocks covering them. She replied, "Keeps de jumbies in. De conk call 'em in, de rock make 'em stay dere."

When we sailed to Salt Island with our newborn daughter, Clementine told me not to cut my baby's fingernails or she would grow up to be a thief. I was more terrified of cutting too close to the quick and let her nails grow until they began to scratch her face as she waved her delicate little hands around her head. (I wonder if that had anything to do with the thick, long, beautiful nails she has always been able to grow.)

Later in the day, I watched as Clementine cleaned a fish at her table near the salt pond. When she discovered pebbles in its stomach, she explained it portended a hurricane. The fish, she said, ate the rocks to sink deeper into the sea to be safe. She warned me to watch the moon that night–a ring around it would verify the storm. We happened to be headed to Hurricane Hole, the safest place to be in a storm. We didn't have bad weather that night, but we did have a tropical wave roll through a week later.

My favorite West Indian wives' tale is the phrase, "You got sand in your shoes, so you got to return." I spent so many years with sand in my shoes that the islands will always feel like home to me and I will always look forward to my return.



Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin

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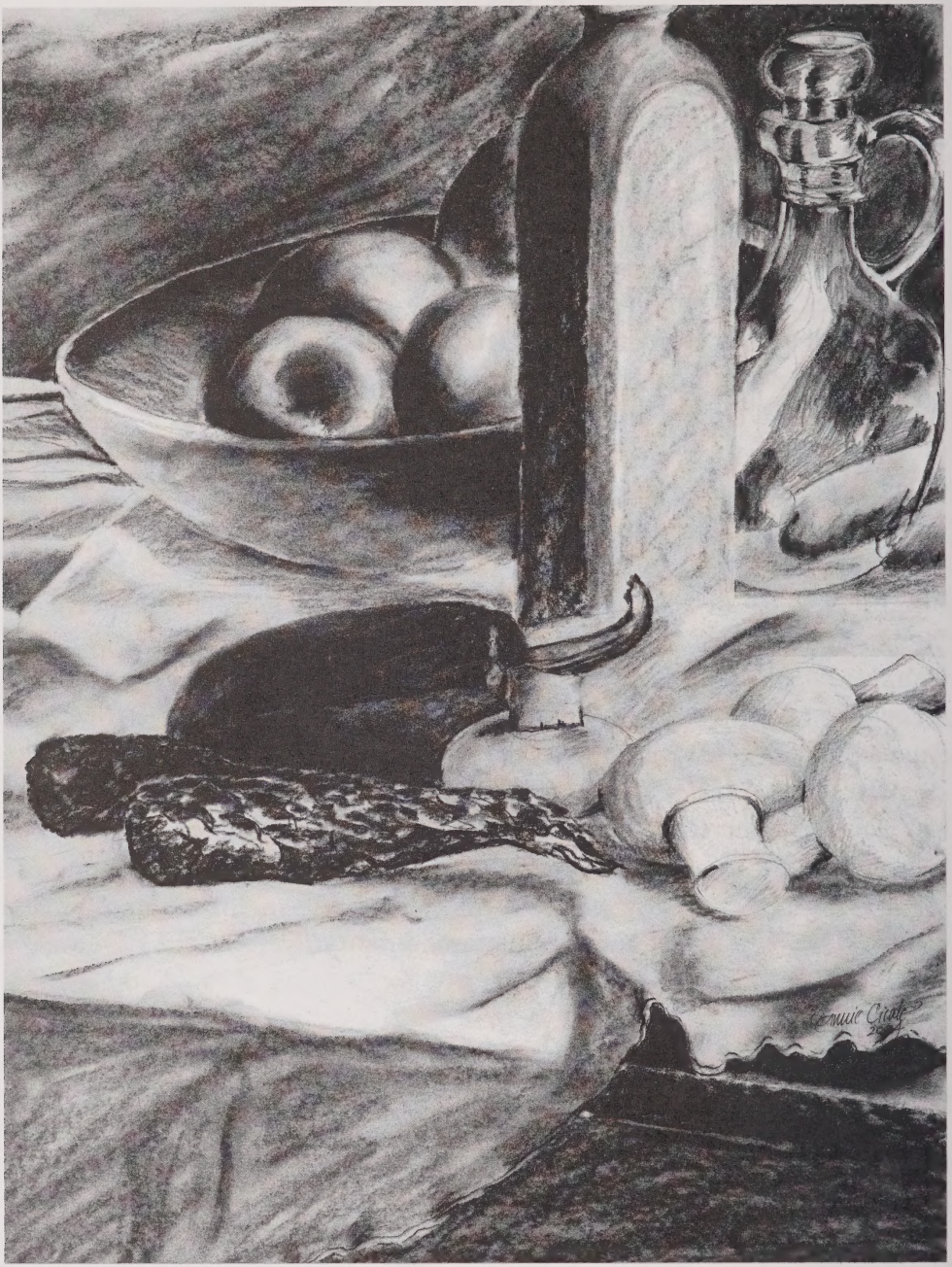
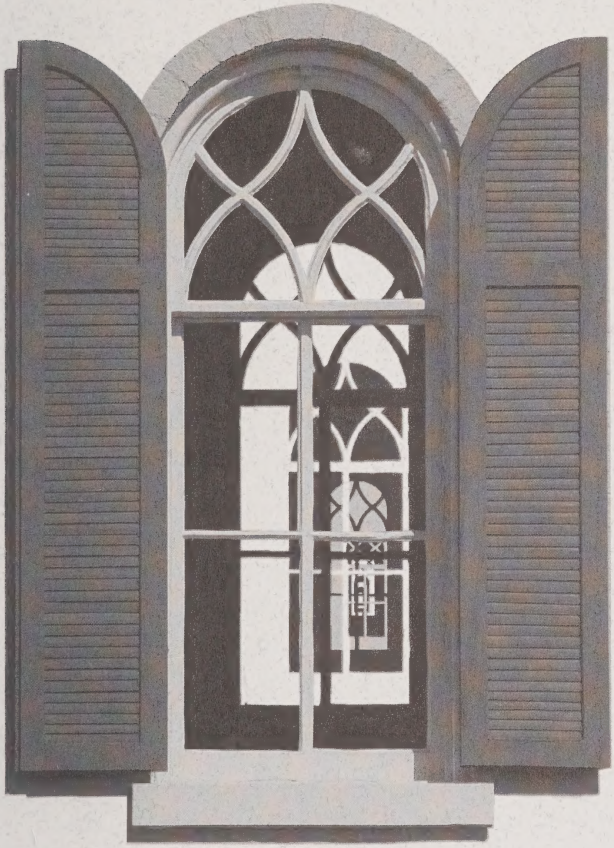
***Victoria Press* continues to include contributions from neighboring community colleges. We thank each contributor, especially Ron Rash.**



Drawing by Annie Cicale

Victoria Press

A-B Tech Community College



10 Year Anniversary

2005

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Victoria Press

Eleventh Issue

Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College
Asheville, North Carolina

2005

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Table of Contents

VP 10 Nancy Dillingham 1
Congratulations to *VP* Fred Chappell 2
Mixed media Fleta Monaghan 2
Look Alive! Fred Chappell 3
Collectors Fred Chappell 4
Drawing Constance Smutz 5
Pilot Snakes Ron Rash 6
Drawing Constance Smutz 6
The Code Ron Rash 7
Drawing Constance Smutz 7
Close to the Bone Nancy Dillingham 8
Drawing Constance Smutz 8
Soiled Doves Nancy Dillingham 9
Drawing Constance Smutz 9
Rank Strangers Nancy Dillingham 10
Photo Jackie Searcy 11
Wicker Basket Cathy James 12
Photo Shirley McLaughlin 13
Morning Run Kelly E. Navies 14
Drawing Sandra Brugh Moore 15
Post-War Depression Susan Snowden 16
Progress Susan Snowden 17
Photo Shirley McLaughlin 17
National Public Radio Report: Two Hundred Elephants Slaughtered in Cameroon Susan Snowden 18
Photo Shirley McLaughlin 19

Thank You, Charlotte Perkins Gilman Kathy Godfrey 20
I Never Wanted a Hero Kathy Godfrey 22
Photo Shirley McLaughlin 24
Photo Shirley McLaughlin 25
When I Wake Kathy Godfrey 26
Drawing Tom Dechant 27
Colors Amy Goodman-Bide 28
Dirty Toes Amy Goodman-Bide 29
Drawing Sandra Brugh Moore 30
Dusk Will Hooper 31
Ode to a Kitten Carolyn Pidgeon 32
Drawing Tom Dechant 32
A Memory Carolyn Pidgeon 33
Fate Julia Nunnally Duncan 34
Photo Lee Schleining 37
Glory Days Chris Fay 38
Pies Jennifer Browning 42
Photo Shirley McLaughlin 43
Your Roof Jennifer Browning 44
Photo Lee Schleining 44
Something-er Jennifer Browning 45
Oil on canvas Fleta Monaghan 45
A Blank Page Jennifer Browning 46
Grace Heather K. Vaughn 47
Photo Shirley McLaughlin 49
At Home Heather K. Vaughn 50

Photo Lee Schleining 51
My Muse Came from the Flea Market Heather K. Vaughn 52
When the bus changes everything Carol Dearing 54
Swimming with That Boy Carol Dearing 55
Grandpa's Sardines Celia Miles 56
Photo Shirley McLaughlin 57
Our Judacullah Friend Dara Llewellyn 58
Drawing Sandra Brugh Moore 58
Being Gabrielle Thompson 59
Photo Shirley McLaughlin 59
Day after Day Kenet Adamson 60
Photo Joe Allawos 61
The Chime Richard DeLuca 62
Serena Belva Joe Allawos 64
Lips pressed in darkness Joe Allawos 65
The Waiting Ron Layne 66
Untitled Chris Tibbetts 67
Photo Lee Schleining 67
To the Baby-Faced Smoker Standing Outside of Laurel on a February Morning Randee Goodstadt 68
Photo Lee Schleining 69
Notes on Contributors 70

VP 10

"We seek the great forgotten language,
The lost lane-end into heaven,
A stone, a leaf, an unfound door."
Thomas Wolfe

With this issue, we celebrate the tenth anniversary of *Victoria Press*.

The magazine was conceived over lunch one day by Celia Miles and Tom Rash. President Bailey enthusiastically supported the idea of a literary magazine for A-B Tech.

During these years, we have been honored to share with our readers the work of our faculty and staff as well as that of members of neighboring community colleges.

The works of noted writers from this region such as Robert Morgan, Fred Chappell, Wilma Dykeman, Chris Cox, Tommy Hays, Michael McFee, Kathryn Stripling Byer, Keith Flynn, and Ron Rash have also graced our pages.

Two of those writers, Fred Chappell and Robert Morgan, came to our campus for meetings with students and public readings. We especially express our gratitude to Fred for his encouragement and his thoughtful comments on our issues over the years.

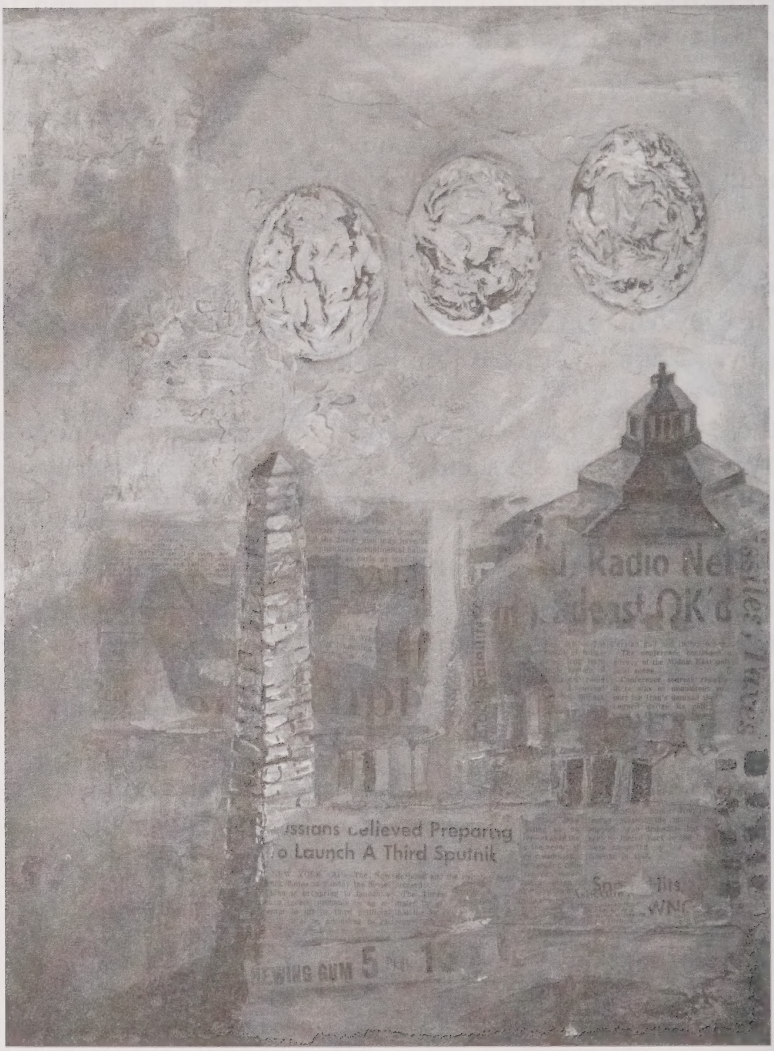
We thank all the past members of the editorial board, President Bailey, and all of you, our readers and contributors, for your patronage. Thanks also to Bob Williams and his staff at Biltmore Press who have worked to produce a first-class magazine for us.

These past ten years have been a terrific time of growth and creativity for A-B Tech. We look forward with much excitement and anticipation to ten more years.

Nancy Dillingham, Editor
For the Editorial Board

"Congratulations to *Victoria Press* upon its tenth anniversary. *VP* is an invaluable publication, in my eyes, because it gives place to voices we might not otherwise get to hear, gives opportunity to young and less familiar writers and artists, and makes a large difference in the atmosphere and tenor of the setting where it thrives. It is one of those welcome enterprises that probably attract less attention than they deserve while active but are sorely wept when missing. May it never join the ranks of the absent! It has earned the right to gain one hundred adventurous years."

Fred Chappell



"Time Line"
Mixed media by Fleta Monaghan

Look Alive!

Fred Chappell

they yelled at Phil
when the grounders evaded his lazy glove
when he backed the family Chevy into the garage door
when he dropped Tuesday a plate
Wednesday a cup Friday a hatchet
that almost severed his left big toe

Look alive!
Phil was alive all right
but only in his head where invisible
ladders sought to lean against the moon

these days infrequently he stops in
on his way from the London cryogenics conference
to performances of his off-Broadway smash
at the good ole Pootertown Tavern
to greet the good ole gang and raise a glass
with Mel Al Pearl Dell Jill & Tull
saying Hi and thinking *For Chrissakes*
can't you guys try at least to
look alive?

While Mel Jill Will & Co. are thinking
Here's ole Phil again
every time he's here we see him
hanging out at the good ole Poot
turned out just like we thought he would
guys like him you can always tell
Hey Phil look alive!
see it just don't register

Collectors

Fred Chappell

it may be supposed that collectors
divulge their innermost beings
by the thing they accumulate

look now upon yon fellow huge and rugged
who locks eggshell china demitasses
in antique glass-front cupboards:
Is it prudent to surmise he wishes
to be a little girl playing Tea Party?
I would not rely upon this conjecture
In a bar fight with "Red Hawg" MacGruder

Mrs. Olivia Hanska possesses
some fifteen dozen enamel snuffboxes
and is allergic to tobacco
What pray tell is her dark secret?

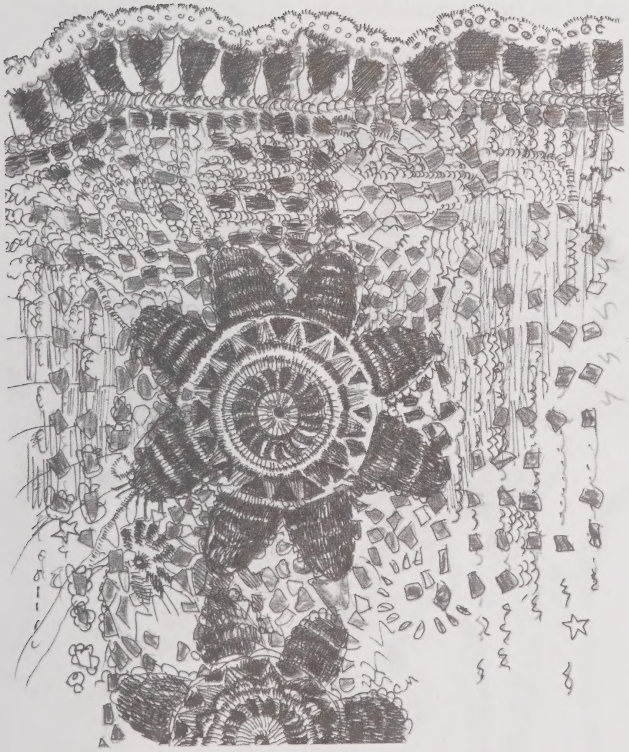
and Ricardo Montaquilo counts
seven ex-wives that we know about:
Because he is fond of women, right?
Seven exes and seven others dispute the notion
Bitterly

the inexpressibly rich Mme von Loringhoven
has collected twenty Catskills dwellings
townhouses cottages mansions lodges
like beggar's lice where she brushed through
the meadow in a long tweed skirt:
Why must she live in Switerzerland?

and Jake "Two Deuce" Wetzler gathers
porcelain thimbles 1500 at last count
maybe it makes some sort of sense
Two Deuce being a casino dealer
but I can't make the connection

and Althea what's-her-name hoards
                something-or-other
I forget what along with her last name
all these instances I adduce
were adding up to make some sort of point
witty and pungent and maybe incisive
that I have mislaid

(excuse me I need to collect my thoughts)



Drawing by Constance Smutz

Pilot Snakes (for David Rash)

Ron Rash

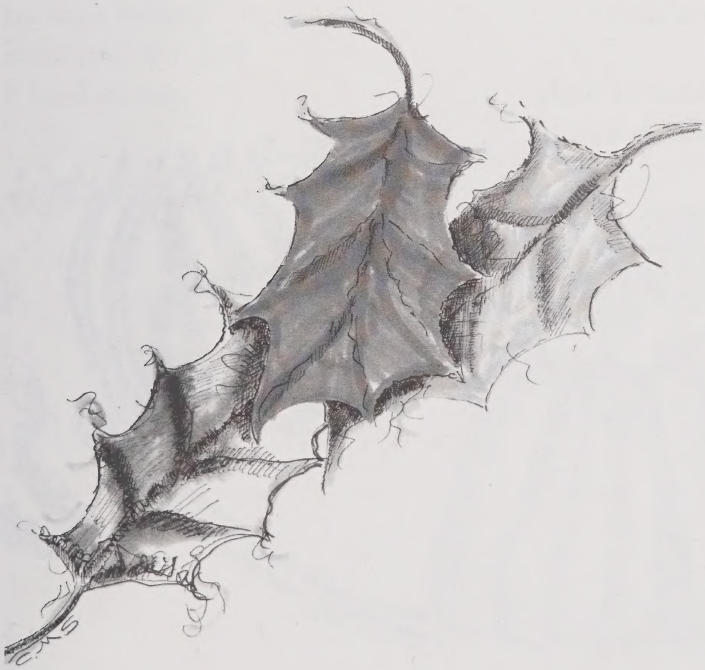
Come fall the copperheads first
make their migration into
rock-cracks, the dark underneath
of their lost warm world. Later
that twined nestball of cold blood
thickened with rattlers, and all
the old farmers and hunters
called those first hibernators
pilot snakes, believing them
sent out as scouts to find dens
for larger vipers, knowing
not just where to go but when,
and though books said *like saddles*
one child believed not saddles
but sand-clocks hauled on their backs

Drawing by Constance Smutz

The Code

Ron Rash

The code said any man who asked received
more than food and shelter, safety too,
so when a stranger came out of the night
with blood upon his shirt, MacGregor knew
what his obligations were and shared
his hearth and meat and whiskey. Soon enough
a pack of hounds leaped baying at the door,
with them men who shared MacGregor's name,
kin seeking one who killed one of their own.
The old man turned them back into the dark,
then led his guest across the hills to where
a boat could be procured. There on that shore
one favor would be asked, a favor granted:
MacGregor dipped the shirt into the loch,
washed his only son's blood from the cloth.



Drawing by Constance Smutz

Excerpts from a work in progress: *Thanks for the Dark but That's Not Home: Poems and Stories*

Close to the Bone

"To get there you have to go in deep."
Maxine Kumin

Through a splash
of autumn leaves

a ghost of a Union soldier
sees in an opening

what he believes to be
a flash of Confederate gray

Going deeper he detects
the stench of decay

Coming closer he finds
curled inside the carcass

of a dead horse
a possum, sleeping

Drawing by Constance Smutz

Soiled Doves

Nancy Dillingham

Civil war raging
we ply our trade
for life and livelihood
giving comfort and aid
to enemy and ally alike

In New Orleans
and Washington brothels
we feather our nests

sanctioned by both sides—
they make us legal
for a while—
some of us even spy

Dying young
(like the soldiers)
we leave behind
innocents who find
it hard to sing

Drawing by Constance Smutz

Rank Strangers (Owed to Sharyn McCrumb)

Nancy Dillingham

When they took
away our salt
to force us
to enlist

we citizens
of Shelton Laurel
stole back
our own supply

Renegades tortured
us for a week
then took our young boys
and old men

to an open field
and shot them

and the baby
they placed
out in the cold
bloomed like a rose
in the snow

"Sand Angel"
Photo by Jackie Searcy

Wicker Basket

Cathy James

Babies look like angels when they die. I think, long ago, when artists searched out inspiration for their images of angels in all those venerated paintings they must have been awed by the faces of their own dead children. In ages when infant mortality was so high, everyone must have carried the imprint of a beloved child in her heart. How it must have colored her view of life. It makes sense that the angels we see immortalized in stained glass windows in churches and in oil paintings in museums are the faces of the children who passed before us.

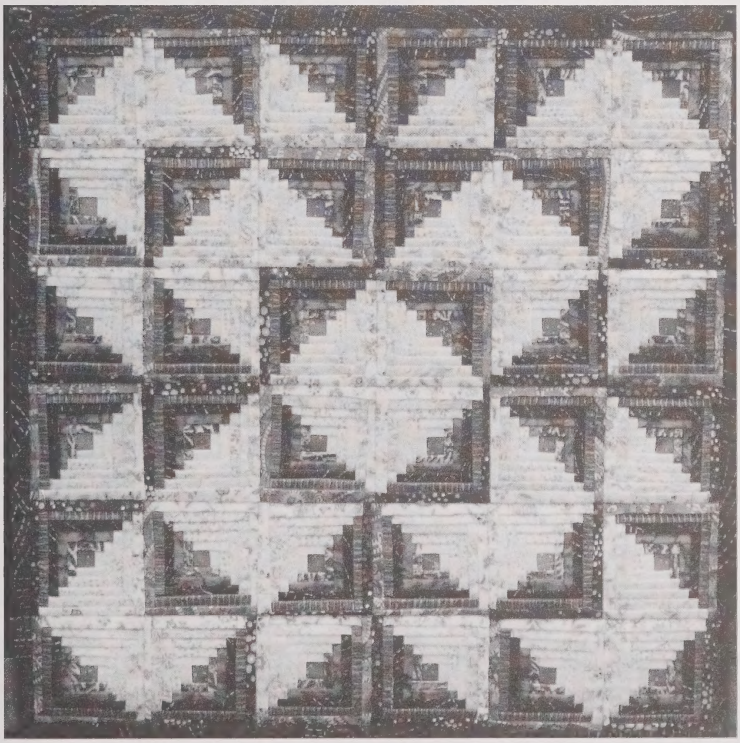
We buried my brother's only child this afternoon; he would have been seven months old today. It was the first time I had ever gone through the ritual of a family burial. I always thought it would be an older member of the family, like a grandmother, or even a parent, but on this Sunday we gathered for my nephew Jason, lying in a white box no bigger than my wicker laundry basket. When my own son was the same age, I remember placing him in a basket of clean clothes one morning after he had fallen asleep in my arms. Looking down at Jason in that infant-sized casket, I shivered.

To my four-year-old daughter Caroline, my nephew appeared asleep with toys in his hands and a soft, blue bear tucked beside him. She told a visitor who approached him, "This is my cousin and he's dead in there," and then she reached down to pat his face while she hummed to herself. Perhaps, when you're four, death has no separation from life. She was the only spot of light in a crowd that pulsed in low, heaving sobs. She passed herself among us like a tiny candle, oblivious of the dark.

Of all the images I took with me from the funeral, I recall a single picture, like a short reel of a home movie. As we waited by our cars for the procession to the cemetery, the funeral director stepped out the side door of the chapel to a waiting, white hearse. He carried my nephew's casket in his hands, away from his body, mindfully and cautiously.

I thought of a basket of newly picked peaches from a garden that I would carry with steady hands so as not to bruise them. I could smell peaches, warm from the sun and ripe from the tree. I am not sure anyone else saw him carrying the casket that brief distance. In spite of all the ritual and ceremony of the funeral, I saw that one motion as the saddest and the most simple in its simplicity. Only one man was needed to carry such a small child. The image had a lack of drama that made it stand out like an old snapshot that you could not remember having taken. That white box must have been so light.

It could have been peaches. Sun-warmed peaches smelling like summer, like life. I could see my nephew, light as an angel on somebody's canvas.



"Glimpse of Spring"
Photo by Shirley McLaughlin of
Janice Maddox's quilted wall hanging

Morning Run (for Daddy, 1943-1991)

Kelly E. Navies

dawn jog
our feet, legs n breath
their own rhythm section
as I struggle to keep up with your powerful stride
few words spoken
so much said

along the way
benign guard dogs bark in envy
at our unabashed freedom
me fifteen, you thirty-eight and in much better shape
even though I'm on my high school track team

soon
we reach the clearing in the hills
you call sacred
in silence we run in place
gazing out beyond the sharp tops of pines and wild brown grass
that rim the brightening sky

continuing on
we will race the last one hundred yards
dashing around the curve leading home
and you will win

finally
between deep intakes of cool morning air
we laugh out loud
waves
of pure joy
our love
bursting forth
like the new day

Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore

Post-War Depression

Susan Snowden

I blamed Mother's madness on Madison Avenue ad men,
who convinced her problems dissolve in the rinse-and-spin cycle,
that glass-domed percolators and chromium pop-up toasters
provide push-button solutions to life's aggravations.

It was marketing whiz kids who filled Mother head
with June Cleaver dreams of greeting us each day
in a starched eyelet apron, her hair a perfect halo,
ready to assist us with projects and homework.

But cheery layouts in *Ladies' Home Journal*
never hinted at the boredom
that accompanies mechanization.
With little to do my mother went crazy,
fixated on "The Bomb" and communist invasion,
her main occupation watching Cronkite's reports
in bleak black and white on our RCA console.

Drumming manicured "Fire and Ice" fingernails,
she waited alone for her family to come home
to marvel at the fruits of her labor:
stain-free fluff-dried clothing,
time-baked TV dinners,
and a Manhattan for Daddy.

Progress

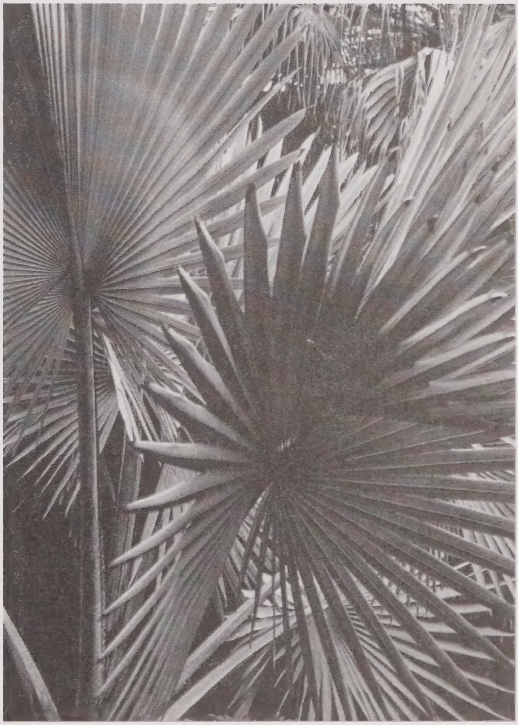
Susan Snowden

Sea grass leans in dawn breeze,
its rustle imagined
by the couple who watches
from a sealed hotel window.

A bulldozer shoves earth
into a tide pool,
groundwork for a building
of concrete and glass.

Deep in the water
fish glide,
turtles idle
as the darkness thickens.

Egrets peer down
from spindly palmettos,
rabbits scatter
toward the eight-lane highway.



"Palm Tree"
Photo by Shirley McLaughlin

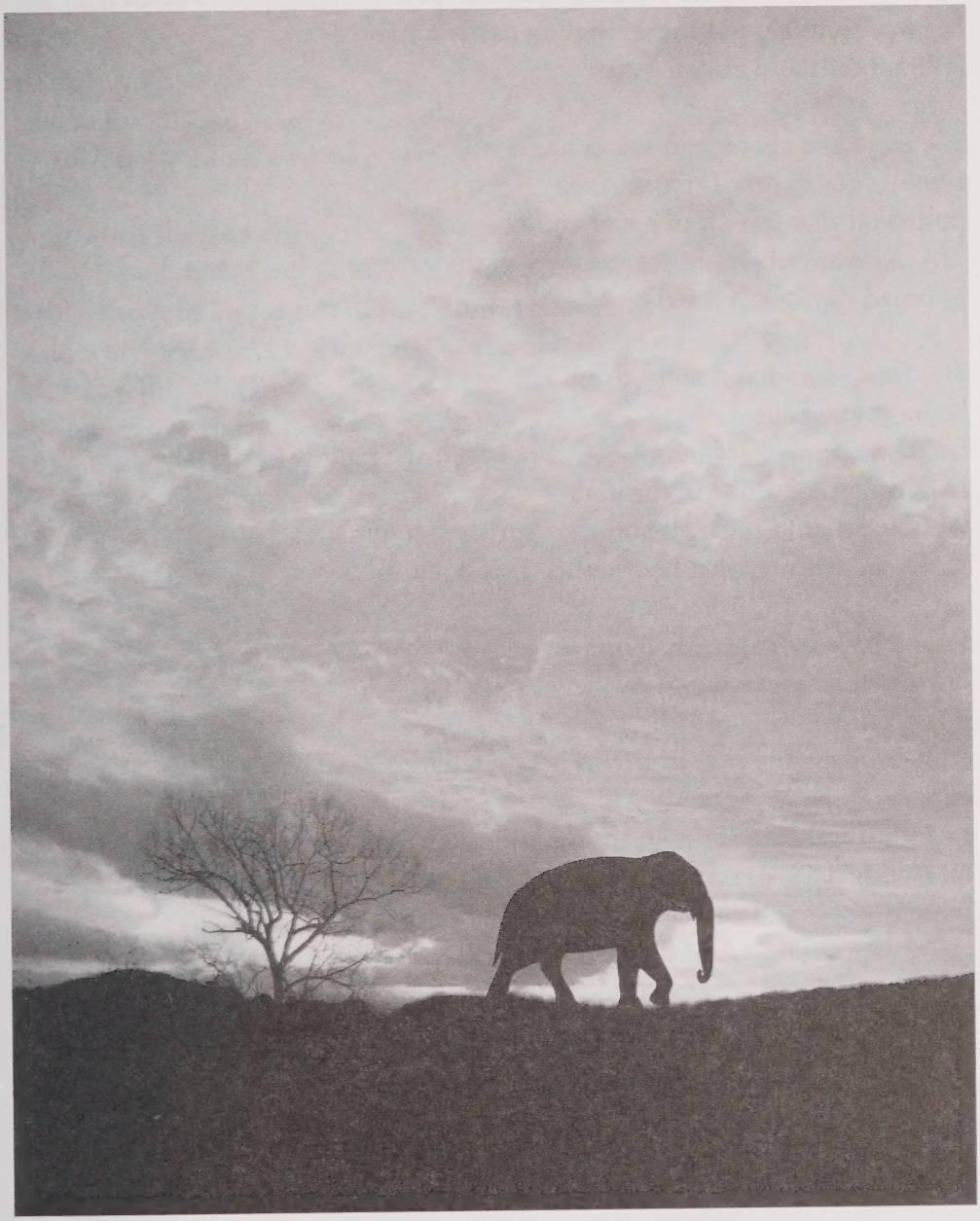
National Public Radio Report: Two Hundred Elephants Slaughtered in Cameroon

Susan Snowden

I am driving to work
a world away when I hear it,
yet I see that sweltering plain
Shimmering layers of color,
burnt umber, sage, yellow-gold,
the breast of the land
rising and falling,
the relentless sun overhead.

I picture the carcasses rotting:
Mothers toppled on calves,
gaping tusk sockets
caked with black blood,
flies moving together
shrouding the scourge.

Thich Nat Hahn
calls for compassion;
Bishop Tutu
preaches forgiveness.
But today a dark part of me argues.
I want to round up men,
fly to the Ivory Coast,
and rout out the poachers,
pin them down and pry out their teeth,
one by one, slowly, slowly.



"Elephant at Sunset"
Photo by Shirley McLaughlin

Thank You, Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Kathy Godfrey

There is a woman in me I never suspected.
She has been trying for years and years to peel
her way from behind the strangling pattern:
lolling heads and bulbous eyes.

She crept and shook and smooched until
I finally got to her. The two of us
pulled off that last bit of paper and now she
can creep anywhere she wants, even in the garden
in broad daylight if it strikes her fancy.

Her fancy could and will I think
be most anything
from swigging chardonnay from a bottle in the middle of the lake
to daring to be alone in the dark
with herself and the owls and the skittish moonlight.
Never wondering what her mother would say.

I don't have to be afraid anymore
of what might leak out of my pen, even
if it is pure pulsing blood.
If the reader can't take it, that is her own darkness to bare.

I can just write on through the dark into the light, or not
on cloudy days, or sometimes in and out again
more times than I can count because
it is a dappled day. And dappled days are writing days too.

On writing days a woman can take in
her own beauty. She can
sip it,
snort it,
smoke it
or stick it right into a fat blue vein.

And when she gets brave,
she can swill it and roll in it like a sweet pink sow with teats
aplenty to feed a yard full of squealing sucklings.
And when the world has its fill at her breast, she can stroll
Unfettered,
Filled, among the stars
skipping neatly around Saturn to avoid disturbing her rings.

I Never Wanted a Hero

Kathy Godfrey

Just a man to grow old with.
I don't need no Superman I'm no Lois Lane.
I don't need to be swept up on a pounding white stallion
whisked away to Never Never Land
Wonderland
Camelot
or long ago and faraway.
I don't need

Tens of thousands slain under my banner
lands spoiled and conquered for the love of my token.
I don't need tear-soaked letters from foreign wars,
purple hearts, bronze stars, blue ribbons, golden calves or swords.
I don't need the spoils of the conquered or the heads of their prophets.
I don't need martial arts, martial law or court martial,

No need
for uniforms, armors, or man-ness,
no need
for Eastwood, Hefner, or Trump,
no need
for palaces, eunuchs, or pure silk
to cushion my fragile ass like glass.
No needs at all.

Desires I have great slobbering hordes, bunched up jostling one another
for light so long
have I kept them down. My body longs for smooth warm hands,
airy touch ravenous clutch and cradling in barely morning,
tickling trails down my thighs, arms wrapped but loosely,
not quite a hold

heavy across my breasts
s
t
i
l
l
connected when it's over.

Even eyes fuzzy with the heat of me trying
to blink slow not to miss
me in this light.

My talking, talking, talking brain wishes for hearing and getting
and quieting and knowing and meeting and
time,
time.
time.

My heart chases healing dropping pieces on the trail
to find its way back to feeling,
to home,
even broken and bleeding
hoping
to stumble on raucous, throw-your-head back, kick-your-skirt-up
laughter,

wild conjuring cackles
tenyearoldJimmyhascooties
I can't breathe giggles.

Laugh
oh God
please laugh with me at the comedy
all that struggling and searching the part that is just me:
little and lame,
fierce and tame,
older than worlds,
innocent as the serpent
in Paradise.

Laugh.

That's all.

"Civil War Soldiers"
Photo by Shirley McLaughlin

"Clouds with Rays"
Photo by Shirley McLaughlin

When I Wake

Kathy Godfrey

Warm yeast and peach preserves, and melting butter
I will wake early to birdsongs
Through screenless windows
Sheers will toss in the dawn breeze
Unafraid of looking foolish to the armoire
Will the birds sing in French?
Absolutment!
I will be too content to get out of bed
But my gut will whine of the late night
With only dancing and wine
So I will pull on a rumpled skirt
Leave my lover smiling twisted in the sheets
And run barefoot over stiff warm cobblestones
To the corner for bread and fruit
I might even skip and swing my skirt
Remembering too late my panties are also in the sheets.
The handsome vendor will nudge his lovely girl and whisper
En son jour, elle etait une beaute, n'est-ce pas?
Then smiling, address me *"Bonjour, Madamoiselle"*
Expecting a blush or correction or protest.

Instead I say *"Bonjour. Quatre croissants, s'il vous plait"*
He doesn't know that I **am** a girl
The kind that makes women want to smell my hair
And recall their child
The kind of girl old men shake their heads and chuckle over
I am the kind of girl that the man in the moon grieves
When he cannot see her in the shadow of the sun.
The kind of girl who smells bread and sighs
Shops barefoot with messy hair
Dumps strawberries on her sleeping husband
And feeds him from her skirt
I am the kind of girl he still dreams of when
No one would know if he didn't
And I will wake in Paris and think,
I remember when this day was only a poem.

Drawing by Tom Dechant

Colors

Amy Goodman-Bide

If I were adrift on a sea, it would be stormy, filled with mourning
As if that were a color
Each rise and dip, the tide assists in
Bringing me closer
A man came to me in a dream
He was the Buddha, he said
Or the Christ or Allah or God
Any name I chose to give
I gave no name
I have no name for the tiny thread sewn between
Myself and my mother, myself and a tree, myself and my love.
If I were to wander in a vast desert, it would not be boiling
Full of toiling dust, trying to escape drought
As if that were a color
The desert has caught me before, lulled me before
To its dry creeks and cyclical floods
When I talk about it, something like heartache catches in my throat
I can't believe I got on the plane
Watched my love's face turn to stone
Because I looked back again and again
In stories, people always return, get off the plane
Go to the arms of a waiting lover
I cried from Paris to the desert, the American desert
Cowboys and strong women
Dirt the color of heartache
Mountains as purple as they claimed to be
I waited like a wound on the land
As if that were a color.

Dirty Toes

Amy Goodman-Bide

My feet dig deep in the dirt
Searching for the cool center
Of summer in the South.
Toenails emerge, ripe with red soil
Ankles flushed with demon chiggers
Those little diamond diggers
That burst through skin and flesh
I become home and parent to
Nature's smallest assassin.

This wet heat expands veins
Expands visions
I dream I am the queen
Of locusts and crickets
Fireflies and moths
Giggles of brooks
And gaggles of geese.
Nature and I, we are swollen with summer
Our tongues lagging before lips
Eyes drooping against the pull of gravity
Sleep washes over me
Like a winter stream.

Even in heat, this land has rhythm.
It teems with wings and
Legs like miniature violins
It is littered with song.
They break my heart
All those tiny songs
They break me like a slide guitar
On a long drive home
When the sun bears down
On my eyes
And love croons in the passenger seat.

Eyes closed, I curl my toes
Into the center of the earth
Where the cold begins
I just barely touch
The whisper of something simple.
I can almost feel the soft breath
That encompasses her like a metaphor.

Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore

Dusk

Will Hooper

On summer afternoons sunlight glares through my daughter's window
in dusty yellow shafts, striking precisely on her television's face.

My legs—they ain't much use no more. But my fingers can dance
all over this remote control; I can change the channels and mute the ads.

My daughter feeds me at noon; we watch the news together. I can watch
anything I please, from *The Guiding Light* to *The Price Is Right*.

Today, I please to watch the wet summer sun melt over a brown grassy
hill and my ten-year-old toes curl and dig into the cool, black earth

and a strange, thin cow shadow stroll lazily across the hill,
its head kneeling down to meet the cow's head where they graze together—

almost anything.

On a Sunday winter morning in 1923 me and my mama walked to church
to the rhythm of the church's bells, crushing ice flowers on a dirt road.

Those frozen crystal shafts shined prism-like colors in the icy new sun.
The cold squeezed them from the red clay and I picked them like flowers

and held them so they melted in my palm's warmth and drained dirty down my fingers.
But I can't get my fingers wet while I use this remote control—it'll short out.

In the evening I sit at the window in these dusty yellow shafts—
within my shuddering ribs I feel the sand trickle down.

Ode to a Kitten

Carolyn Pidgeon

Wobbling on fuzzy new legs
the dusky grey kitten
pads in his milk,
then douses
nose and whiskers
in the white pool,
the creamy drops
making a goatee
of his tender chin.

Too soon such enchanting confusion
will vanish,
in the grown and sleek cat's perfect manners.

Drawing by Tom Dechant

A Memory

Carolyn Pidgeon

Haven't got one sweet thought,
not one,
for you.
All those feelings
once a warm brick inside,
just dry crumbles now
and red dust.

But sometimes
the dart
of a hummingbird
startles a memory
of what I thought was you.
My heart races
with the rhythm of its wings.
Ruby and iridescent green
splash before my eyes.
And I tremble
for what should have been.

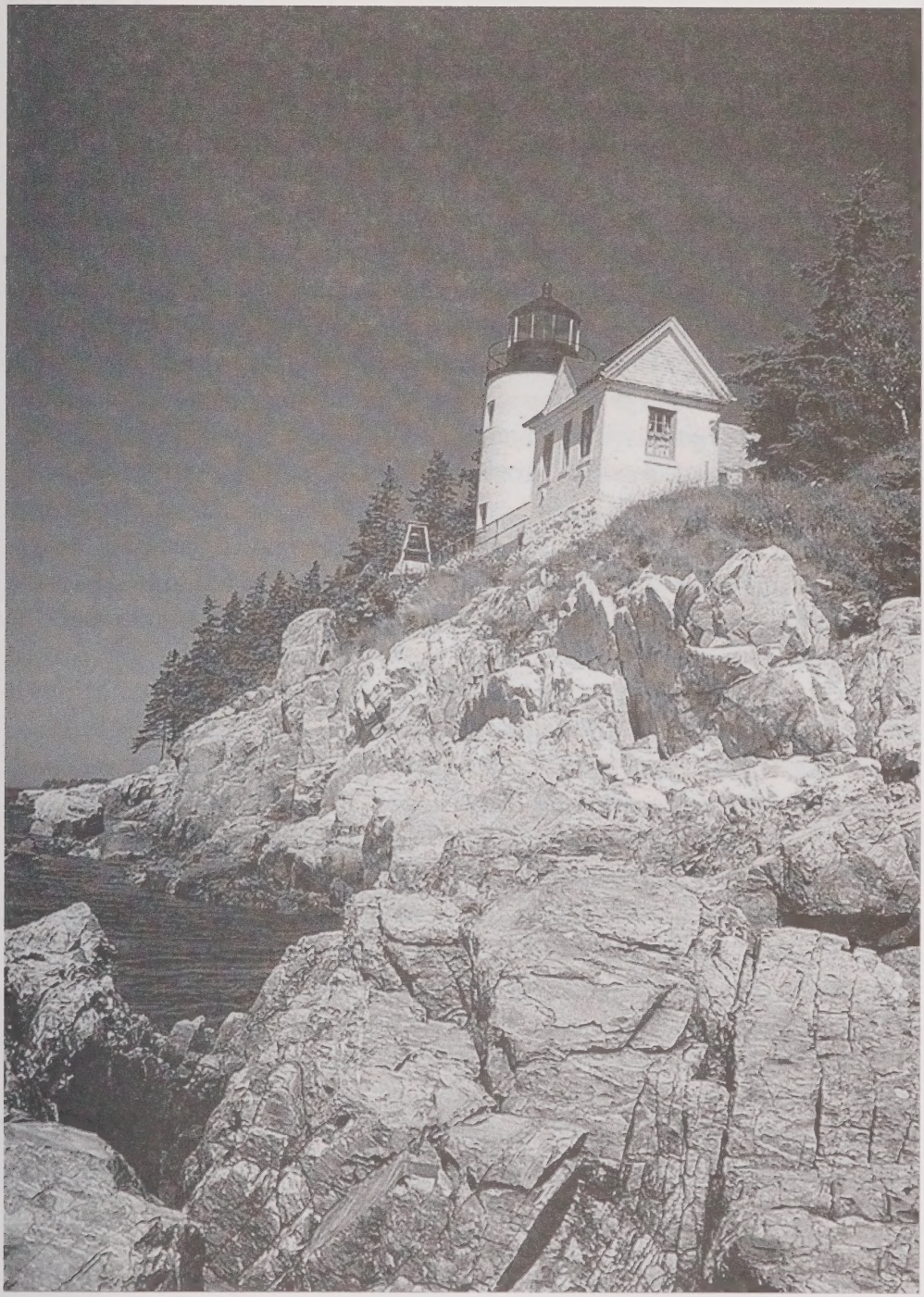
Fate

Julia Nunnally Duncan

She believed in the old ways
didn't put stock in modern notions
of coincidence or in confused explanations
of the *odd* that a teacher might offer.
It was powers she'd heard of as a child,
such as the placing of a hand on a wart
and rubbing in some concoction
passed down from mama to daughter
to remove the growth,
that she trusted.
It was a gift some women had—
her own great-aunt witness to
such magic
though she died from the taking of her mole—
melanoma a doctor would say;
Why did she let someone tamper with
it that way?
Yet still that death didn't change
her family's belief in the power.
So when she first saw the man on Main Street
and knew beyond a shadow of a doubt
that he was what she wanted,
she searched her mind for recollections
of tales told in her earliest days—
whispered stories on summer front porches
of fireballs and panthers
and spells—
and she set her mind on getting him.
In the shadows of her cold room at night
for two solid weeks
she lit a candle
and held her hand up

as if taking a vow
or swearing an oath
and closed her blue eyes tight.
Think about me, she whispered
and held the image of his face
in her mind.
Want me, she said,
(as I want you).
She chanted this until the wee hours,
her throat so sore she couldn't swallow
and until the candle wick drowned in the
pool of wax and she was left
in moonless dark.
In bed, warmed by a covering of quilts
her great-grandma had stitched
eighty years before,
she thought of the man's dark eyes,
his curly black hair;
his clean, crisply laundered white shirt
and overcoat
that a banker wore.
And she forgot that he might feel
too good for the likes of her
(why, down their noses
the tellers looked
when she sneaked in to get a glimpse
of him).
Never mind.
A December Friday evening when she
stood outside the First National Bank
and waited for him to come out
of the tall glass doors,
lo and behold
he stepped outside

stood on the street
and looked straight at her
though she didn't call his name
Fate (such a fine and pretty name!)
and he held her gaze.
His eyes did not leave hers for some time.
Thank you, Lord,
she said,
looking up into the gray sky,
her eyes blurred with tears;
Thank you, Lord
(though she knew Jesus might not have been
the cause of her good fortune)
and she held her hand over her heart
for a moment
and then over her mouth
to cover the grin that she couldn't stop.
He took an interest in me,
she thought
and watched him turn and walk down the street,
cut the corner by the Rexall Drug Store
and disappear.
I'll have you in my bed before it's over,
my darlin' Fate,
she thought
and started the long walk home.



Bass Harbor Light, SW Harbor, Maine
Photo by Lee Schleining

Chris Fay

Naturally, I remember certain milestones in my life (my first home run, hockey goal, touchdown, and kiss) as though they occurred last month. And so it is with the first time my name made it onto a newspaper's sports page.

I was one of only three sophomores promoted to the varsity on my high school's baseball team. Unfortunately, it was a team deep with junior and senior talent, and while I was coming along as a shortstop, the senior I was playing behind was a very talented four-sport athlete. I usually made it into a game only when we were either up or down a minimum of ten or twelve runs. About mid-season, though, our star shortstop was ailing from injuries incurred in another sport. Just before a Friday afternoon game with one of our big rivals, he had to have both of his knees drained and was unable to play. As I was dressing out at my locker for yet another day sitting on the bench, our coach came up and told me he was in a jam and had to start me at shortstop today. He was emphatic that he had never started a sophomore before, and this could well be the last time, but that was up to me. Nothing like a little motivation to bring out a better performance, huh?

Most of the game went uneventfully, at least at my position. We were losing to a better team, but not badly. Then, in the seventh or eighth inning, we found ourselves in the field with the bases loaded, no outs and our usually great pitcher John Konitzer losing his stuff. I was not unfamiliar with situations like these, having grown up watching and playing baseball. In fact, I had turned many double plays in little league and community center ball. This, however, was a golden opportunity, given my tenure on the team. A couple of pitches later, the batter hit an extremely hard line drive up the middle. Konitzer tried feebly to get a glove on it, to no avail. I shot out of my crouch to my left, glove extended toward second base. I watched and felt the ball go solidly into the pocket … that's one out. The runner at second had left way too early, and I was in position to step on the bag behind him … that's two outs. By now I found myself off the line between first and second base and, like the runner before

him, the guy formerly on first base had assumed "base hit up the middle" and left too soon. This was too easy; all I had to do was make a good throw to first, so I stared at the first baseman's chest and delivered a short, crisp throw. Triple play!

All 20 to 25 spectators, mostly fellow students, went wild. Only my wannabe/not-quite girlfriend seemed confused about the significance of what had just occurred. Every member of my team ran to where I was standing and heartily slapped me on my back and head. Coach was still in the dugout, but clearly pleased. Disarmed and shocked, the other team (mostly seniors) looked toward the umpires who could easily erase the play by determining that I had missed the tag out at second. No, the umpires turned their backs to go to the backstop, and the play stood.

Whatever happened the rest of the game and over the next twelve hours could not have transpired fast enough; I eagerly awaited the delivery of the next morning's newspaper. I barely slept, envisioning a front-page account of the rarest of all events in baseball having occurred locally. And by a backup player trying to establish himself on the team, no less. I couldn't decide if my name would lead the story, show up in the headlines and then again in the latter paragraphs, or perhaps get its own sidebar story all by itself. As dawn broke, I was standing at the front window trying not to look too eagerly for the paperboy. As he came down the street throwing the paper, I'm sure I caught mine after its first bounce onto the driveway. Nothing on page one … or page two, but page three, with all the high school box scores … let's see, hey, a two-paragraph story on our game. Second paragraph began with "a triple play begun by reserve shortstop Chris Fry ("FRY"?), ("begun by"? … I had completed it, hadn't I?). I scanned the rest of the article, taking in none of it. FRY? How could this have happened? I had my name on my back: "F-A-Y." "17." Surely Coach Gallassinni had given them my name correctly, right? They never misspelled his name. They could have gotten it off the umpire's

lineup card or the scorekeeper's book which had our entire name, number and position. "FRY"? No, my name was mentioned twice, misspelled in the box scores too, as well as in the one-sentence account of my heroics. Obviously an inexperienced writer had not grasped the significance of what had occurred. I staggered through the front door and into the foyer, feeling like I had been hit by a truck. "Is it in there, dear?" my mother asked from the kitchen. I was still staring incredulously at what was supposed to be my name and thinking if I looked at it long enough, perhaps it would change itself. "Who do you call when a mistake of this size gets made in the paper?" I growled. "Let's me see, honey," she said, relieving me of the betrayal I held in my hands. "Well, dear, you're awfully new at this kind of thing; I'm sure they'll get it right next time." "Next time? I'll be ninety the next time I make a triple play."

The next few weeks went along like much of the season had, with me playing sporadically and well enough but neither hitting or fielding like the star of the team I was playing behind on the roster. Toward the end of the season, the same sportswriter called my parents' home wanting to include me in a story of upcoming players to watch locally in the next couple of years. He wanted to speak with me personally, if that was okay. My mother handed me the phone, telling me who it was calling. My greeting was "How could you mess up a name with only three letters in it?" Obviously the passage of time had done little to ease the sting. There was a pause on the other end of the phone while my mother screeched at me to "be civilized." The pause on the phone was followed by "I'm sorry, son; have we met?" This was clearly not the sound of a man meaning to pierce my heart with an arrow, but a rather pleasant-sounding young guy. The rest of the conversation went pretty well, with the writer promising to personally check the copy before it went to print to ensure I was not damaged again.

I've been the subject of many other press accounts, predominantly because of my twenty-something-year career in law enforcement. The sting dissipated long ago to the point where I hardly notice anymore if the names or facts show up in print incorrectly. Still, I save them all, except that I also recall tossing that first one into the kitchen trash can as though it had been written for some other unknown person, on the other side of the world. But, in my memory, that triple play still made me the local hero for the week.

Pies

Jennifer Browning

Thanksgiving has always been a big deal at our house.
That day of the year when grandmama,
then mom,
then I
get to show our affection through food.

Everyone gets his own pie.
Joey gets chocolate,
Jamie gets lemon,
Daddy minced meat.
When Uncle Steve came, it was coconut crème;
When Uncle Bill came, there was a second chocolate.
The women and girls seldom got a pie. We got
whatever.

Mom changed it some.
For the two of us, there was always cake,
usually pineapple upside-down cake,
the brown sugar crystallized down the side,
the heavy iron skillet turned over by Daddy
'cause it was too heavy for Mom to lift
and turn the cake out onto the plate.

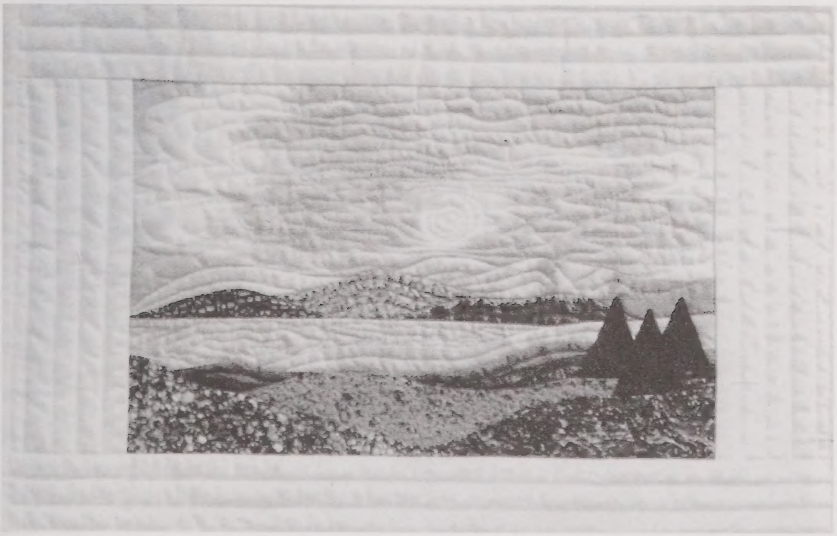
I've made my own changes.
Now, there are friends invited too,
and there isn't as much family.
The canned cranberries in their congealed
wobbly state have been relegated to the Manna bag.
Now, it's red velvet instead of pineapple.
Daddy's not there to lift the skillet any more.

But when I say the blessing,
Mom and Daddy are still there.
Mom will be watching as I make her special dressing.
Daddy will still want to sneak a bite.

He just can't tell me if it's
too salty,
too sage-y,
too bland.
The dressing bowl, the huge plastic green one
used for as many years as I've been alive,
will heave with its load of cornbread, onions,
celery and broth. Poured out of its stomach
will be the smells of my holiday memories.

The pies this year are not as numerous.
Joey will still get chocolate, Jamie lemon.

Me?
I'll have cake—just like my mommie taught me.



"Wildflowers among the Cabins"
Photo by Shirley McLaughlin of quilt by Janice Maddox

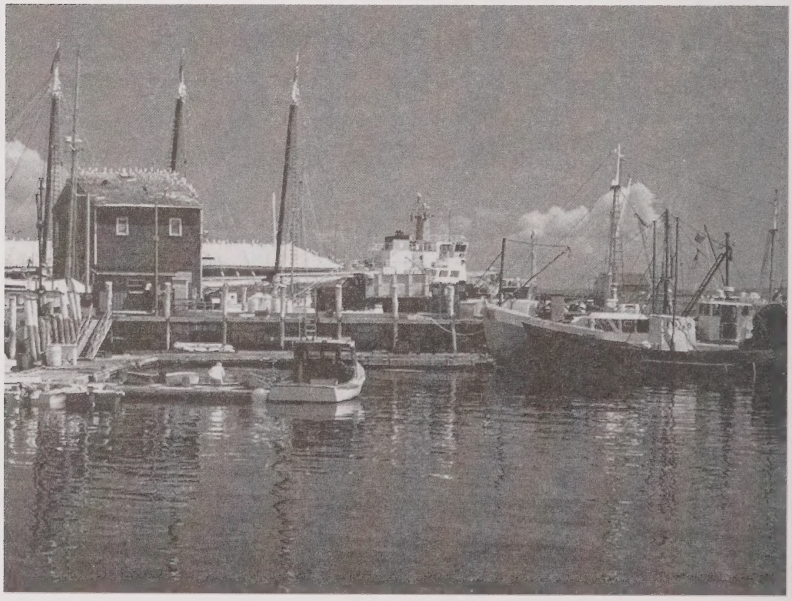
Your Roof

Jennifer Browning

"Shall we dance?" you said.
"Sure," I replied.

I wanted to float away on a Harlequin romance
Except
of course
my feet hurt
I felt fat
I wondered if the shrimp were still on my breath or
if you'd feel the bead of sweat on your palm
nestled in the small of my back.

Your Irish eyes looked into mine
Grace Kelly
Bing Crosby
"True Love" floating on the air.
I stubbed my toe.



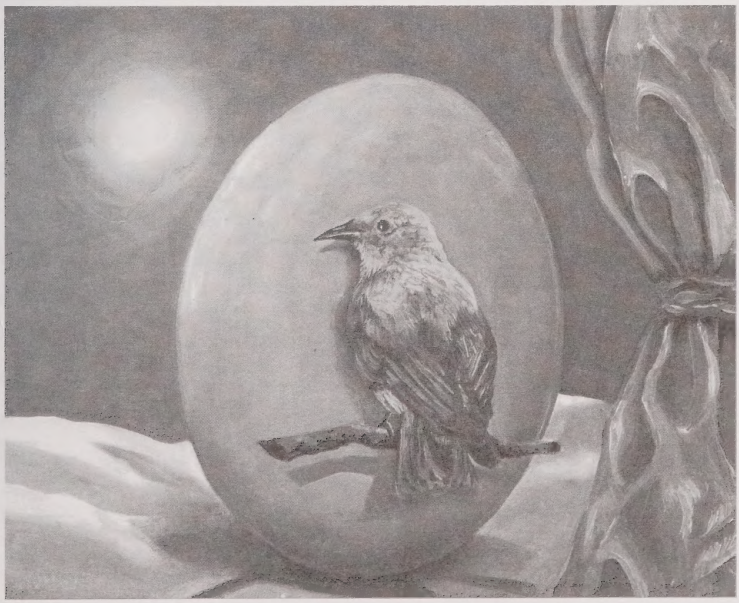
Rockland Harbor, Maine
Photo by Lee Schleining

Something-er

Jennifer Browning

I used to wish upon stars every night.
I was convinced that I if I believed it strongly enough,
it would happen—
wish to be
prettier,
skinnier,
smarter,
something-er—
wish for someone to be there, wish to be somewhere else.
I don't wish on them anymore.
Wishing only makes the void more noticeable.
Now I just look at them when I think about it.

A lot of the time, I don't think of it.
I take the dog out, watch her poop,
but never once do I look up.
I'm sure that says something about me . . .
I'm more likely to look at shit than beauty.



"Interlude with One Bluebird"
Oil on canvas by Fleta Monaghan

A Blank Page

Jennifer Browning

How intimidating.
Of course,
one is tempted just to drivel.

But, there's so much potential
  in a blank page.
So much room to blather and
  dream.

I can be anyone on a blank page.
Nothing that came before counts;
nothing that comes after matters.

What will it reveal?
Will I suddenly be whatever it is
  I'm supposed to be?
Or, will I regurgitate and be the
  same old same old?

I have so much potential for change
  on a blank page.
No one has preconceived notions—
  Least of all me.

There is freedom in that.
There is fear in that.
What if I can't fill it?
What if I end up with something horrible?

Grace

Heather K. Vaughn

He bowed his head saying alleluia.
What did ya say that for grandpa?
Looking at the blond-haired girl
thick braid falling down the center of her back
eyes neither blue or brown a color he could
never transfix in his mind
looking at him.
He had forgotten she was there.
Unlike other children that age
running ahead grabbing leaves or sticks
and bringing them back for inspection
Alex always trotted along quietly
bare feet leaving her
wispy imprints in the dirt.
I dunno, he replied clearing his throat
Sometime I see things on my walk that strikes me
a particular way.
Her eyes, perplexed, watched
her feet move beside her grandfather's.
She took a deep breath
having thought for a moment;
like what, grandpa?
He had been opposed to taking her along
on these afternoon walks, the time he meant to have for himself
away from his wife's loud television
and the phone with people trying to sell him credit.
He was the type of man that thought
he made sense only to himself.
Oh, I dunno, just now
I was looking over yonder
right above that mountain range, see?

And, ah I noticed the birds, geese
probably, flying V-shaped, headin' for
warmer weather and then came up that wind,
and I heard it go through the trees.
He glanced sideways seeing if she was listening.
Her yes held a far away look towards Seven Sisters
And ya get a particu-lar feeling? she asked
tilting her head to one side
breathing in a sigh.
Well, I never could stand church goin' religion.
Me and God came to understand one another
when I wasn't no bigger than you.
Alex sometimes I
and then he stopped and caught his breath.
She stopped
and stood in front of him
shielding her hand over her eyes from the sun
waiting.
I walk and I listen to the wind
in the trees, hear the leaves
I hear somethin'
like some spirit watching over
the good things.
Like I don't have to worry so much
or be sad, just grateful
to have heard.
Alex looked at her grandpa's
white mustache and his eyes
that drooped some from the weight
of the tendriled wiry gray eyebrows.
His entire face clung to a calm
wonderment of the path they walked.

Yeah, I know what you mean grandpa
She said slipping her hand into his
and giving a squeeze then
kicking a round stone into a bed of moss
both of them looking
at the path ahead.

"Trees, Geese, and Clouds"
Photo by Shirley McLaughlin

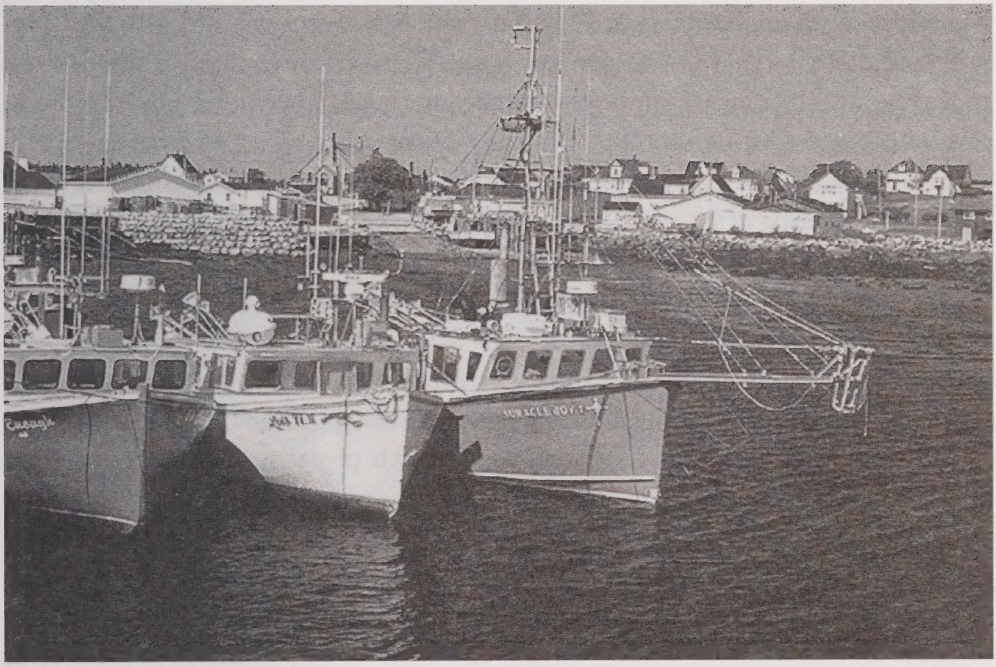
At Home

Heather K. Vaughn

At home on holiday,
I hear her late at night cleaning the kitchen, pacing the hallway
Finally clicking off the lights.
I hear her pull back the sheets and slump into bed.
The house settles into awkward silence.
I know she's awake, lying next to my snoring father, thinking
Of my life and all the mistakes.

The next day,
When I come downstairs, I see her eyes are tired.
She sips her coffee as she kneads bread for dinner.
She clears her throat and says,
"I don't understand you. Why do you waste your life away?
You're young; you should have fun.
You're going to end up alone. Do you hear me?
You're going to be alone. And that boy now, he's not it; I know it.
In ten years, you're going to wake up and it'll be too late.
Talk to me.
Why don't you tell me what goes through that mind of yours?
I swear I don't know you."

She says this, kneading the bread in punches, every morning.
Some mornings bring variations.
Some mornings she exhumes my mistakes, choices, recalling
The time I nearly became Jewish. My one-year engagement to a very stupid man.
She stirs up the two years I was a vegetarian, hanging with hippies.
She reminds me of all the masks and skins I've worn and discarded.
She reminds me she doesn't sleep for thinking of me.
My eyes, exactly like my mother's, glue themselves to the floor,
Searching at my feet for some concrete answer to her questions.
I have the answer my mother wants.
When I open my mouth, the words form themselves in a high-pitched
"I'm sorry."



Shelbourne Harbor, Nova Scotia
Photo by Lee Schleining

My Muse Came from the Flea Market

Heather K. Vaughn

My Muse sleeps quiescently, resting her head on cloud-like bubbles of imagination, stirring only when she is bored.

The Muse is a spirit of inspiration with solemnity. A spirit? Really? I conjure images of a divine enchantress guiding hands and mind through corridors of chimerical journeys sometimes changing form into Shakespeare's succubus Queen Mab ignominiously doing what she pleases without regret or question. My Muse must be different.

My Muse is no enchantress or succubus; she is a seven-year-old girl with pigtails and freckles that cover just her nose. That imp wakes up at four in the morning, as I am stringing one sentence to another hoping I have an assertion concerning Sir Walter Scott's *Heart of the Midlothian* and subsequently dreaming I sound intelligent even though it is obvious at least a hundred white Protestant men have set up the "rules" for writing about Scott long before my creative misgenius took hold of his prose.

I connect my Muse to growing up in the South, how I feel about hubris raping the earth, and feminist voices singing—not as cherubs or angels, but as women. And through my philosophical inspirations and kaleidoscope past and present, I return to that little girl with pigtails, chocolate doe eyes, and freckles. Perhaps it is her innocence.

But my Muse is not innocent; it's more of a simplistic shy awareness. A grasping at what it means to listen to the wind run through the prairie grass, to open all the windows and lie in the darkness naked, to imagine the horror accomplished in the name of politics, to mind fuck with words just barely learned in a manuscript bound for nowhere.

That is what this spirit who mostly sleeps does when she is bored and alone and too full of inspiration to do little else. She looks around and screams in a whisper. My Muse is an amalgamation of what I have learned, what I have rejected, moralities of my parents, humility, and hours that I hated myself for.

My Muse is details, if anything. She observes the ladybug crawling up Great-Aunt Virginia's portrait in our living room, the rubber band always on the priest's left wrist, and the shrunken, bent-aged woman in a pink bathrobe pushing a shopping cart with a scraggly-ass poodle in the basket.

My Muse is the colors, the sounds, and the smells in writing. My Muse belongs to no heavenly creation; she is some sort of a tatterdemalion I found wandering in a secondhand bazaar. I worry little about what my Muse is. It is the *who* that I spend a great deal of time wondering about.

The spirit that twists my mind so many ways, sleeping through the important term papers and waking up to spew only poetry for which I get no grade at all, my Muse is selective and stingy. My Muse comes from years and years of wandering in a marketplace where advice comes in paperbacks, half price, torn covers, telling me to sell my soul for the sake of writing.

When the bus changes everything

Carol Dearing

I sit on that bus
That smells like vinyl and sweat
--just avoid the back
Where the mean people sit and slit
Open the backs of the seats with huge knives.
I move slowly, slowly
To the front of the bus
As I can
  as they leave
And stare—every day—
In wonder
At the calm grassy lawn, the boxy shrubs, the ranches, the split-levels, the two
stories with columns on the clean front porch, the lit driveways, the covered boats
I can smell the clean new foyers
Hear the fine old clocks ticking
See the tailored draped curtains.

Then we turn down the highway
And it's just me and Mrs. Golda
(the strong bus driver with too much hair)
I'm her favorite
Because I'm the last
And at my stop we sit still and listen
To the clickety click of the blinker
And look down my dark overgrown driveway
Where the branches pester my face
And the roots look like snakes,
Or
The snakes look like roots.
"Well, it's the end of the line, girl!"

Swimming with This Boy

Carol Dearing

No boy ever asked me
So I say yeah
I run inside (I can't breathe)
Put on my suit.

I start at the river to jump in
But he stops me—what's this?
A scar turned purple and thick like a worm on my thigh.
I climb out of the pool of water from a rock—it's cold cold!
What's this—his head all cockeyed,
Worn off polish on my toes.
I rub the towel all over my head.
He touches the top of my head—what's this here?
I got a sunburn, now it's peeling from my scalp.
We jump in on 3 count
I see him staring at my moving legs underwater
My blue-white legs
The same color of skim milk
bad grocery store light
or dead people

We walk home, our skin all tight,
His hair combed and shiny like a baby seal
I think now he has a slanted opinion of me
His future plans watered down by what he spied.
I prattle along nervously about the abandoned house on the left, the pony with a
broken leg on the right, the time my uncle hit a goat with his truck right here
in the road
(I don't tell we ate it)
He listens, he nods, did he sigh?
Then he stops and tries to kiss me—(I can't breathe)

Grandpa's Sardines

Celia Miles

Grandpa drinking, Grandpa drunk
Staggering, stumbling, slipping down the doorframe
onto the front porch, yelling
Bring me some of them sardines
and crackers from the store.
(He never ate sardines with biscuits or cornbread.)

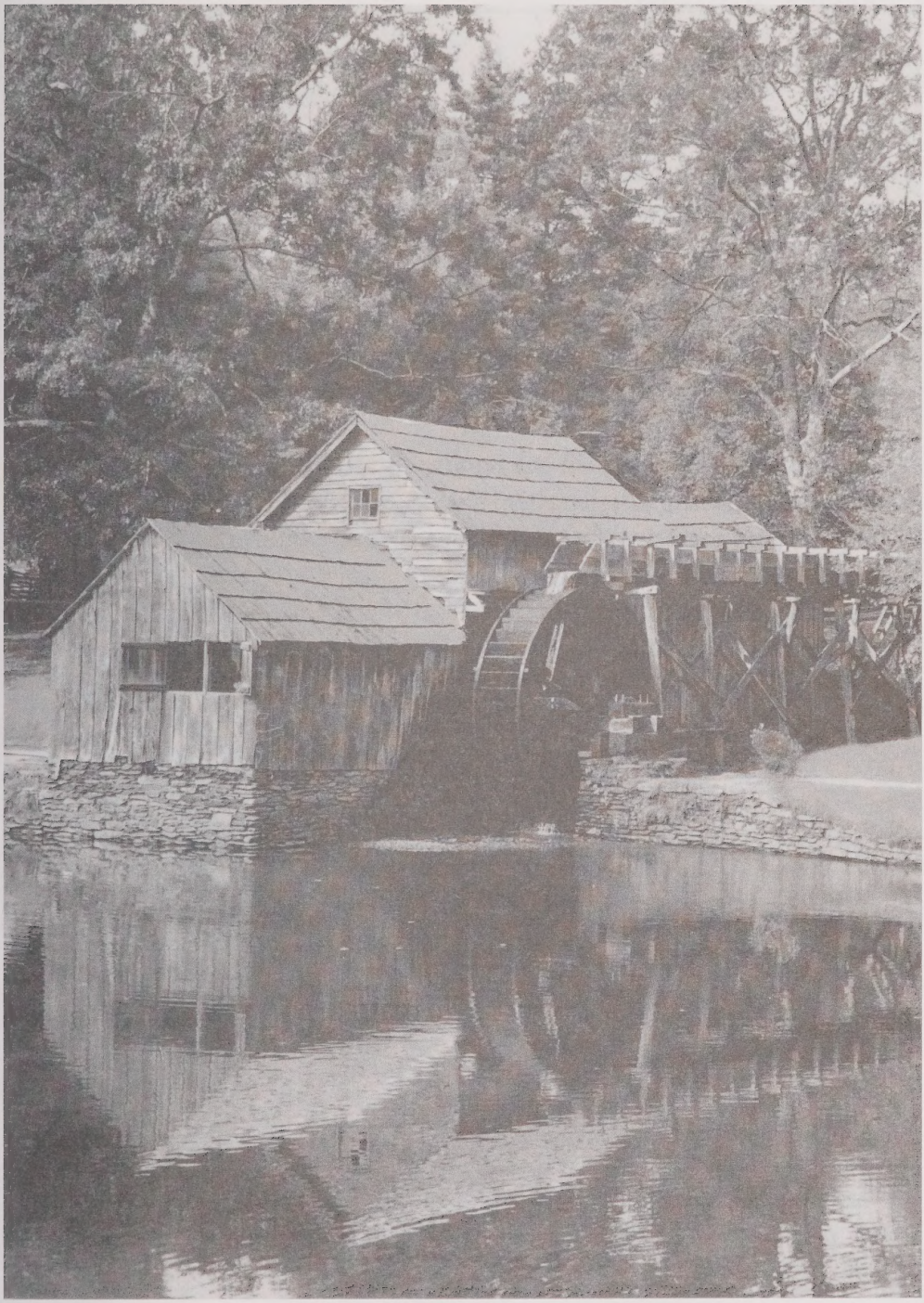
We batted tin cans with sticks of stove wood,
bent and studied and shot marbles in swept-dirt circles,
always aware but paying him no mind until he yelled.
Bring me some of them sardines, I said.

Once he'd fumbled with the little attached key,
bloodied his thumb,
fingered sardines from their oily bed
wiped his mouth with his hands,
his hands on his loose overalls, he'd slump
blocking the door, empty sardine tins all around.

Some day he might halfway straighten up
dig into his pockets, find loose change,
cuss-mumble and throw the coins to us
a royal gesture gone awry. "Away, the lot of you."

We watched his sprawling slumber, waited
for nickels and dimes that sometimes escaped his pockets
if he thrashed, dreaming, drooling;
waited for his awakening, for his surprise
to see us there, watching, but quietly so.

After he came to, he didn't want sardines.
And we had our grandpa back.



"Mabry Mill"
Photo by Shirley McLaughlin

Our Judacullah Friend
October 2004

Dara Llewellyn

We celebrate her all along the Parkway,
never finding Water Rock Knob,
moving from overlook to overlook

We accept nature's offering:
a small rock—her strength,
a tiny pine cone—her protective shield.
We light a candle for her beauty, her bravery, her will.

Earlier, we held her ashes in our hands,
letting the dust slip away in the wind,
flinging our memories after them.
Today, we stand together in the pines,
smell the resin, and
feel the loss of her light.

Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore

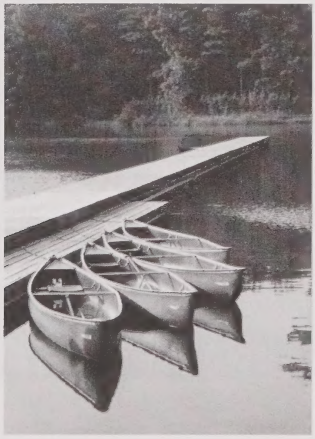
Being

Gabrielle Thompson

Trees reflect in a kaleidoscope of color
upon the zephyr-kissed surface of the river
umber, rust, vermilion, and gold fracture
in the sparkling mirror of the water's surface,
offering short-lived beauty in the chromatic light.

Pepper, tongue lolling from a smiling mouth
dripping tiny rainbows onto her silken, ebony coat,
studies the opposite bank.
Her ears perk and mouth closes, silencing her pant, as she watches
the movement of squirrels on the far shore.
With a glance at the chilly expanse of water,
she blinks away the thought of chase.

I bask beside her in the last remnant of fall's warmth,
watching the canoe on its tree-tether wave to and fro, to and fro
in the breeze that beckons us to further adventure.
It cannot shake me from my complacency,
from feeling content just to be.



"Summer's End"
Photo by Shirley McLaughlin

Day after Day

Kenet Adamson

My alarm clangs alerting me that I'm late.
My sons need breakfast, lunches need packing, and the dog needs a walk.
My school starts in minutes and I'm not half-dressed.

The boys pour forth from car doors to school sidewalks
While the radio reminds me to scurry to work.
I flop in my office and drop behind my desk.

No matter to whom I am speaking, they are wrong person, wrong place, wrong time.
Students want schooling, advisees desire advising, colleagues crave counseling,
And administrators demand that attention must be paid.

Now, sons need to be picked up, packed in cars,
and placed at tables for procrastination.
Homework is stupid, and the dog needs a walk.

Costumes changes, snatches of conversation
And we're back out the door for sports.
Summer and winter, they swim. Fall and spring are soccer.

We dash home to choke down dinner.
Instruments are practiced, dishes pile up,
And the aerobic attempts at showering boys begin.

Of each book, to each son, we read a few pages,
But the clock states it is too late
Tomorrow will be better, just wait.

Dishes are stuffed in the dishwasher.
Counters are wiped and one last attempt
To conquer the laundry pile fails.

It's too late to read, relax or romance.
Tomorrow night we'll date, dance and dine.
But tonight the dog needs a walk, and it's already midnight.

"Hands"
Photo by Joe Allawos

The Chime

Richard DeLuca

I was waiting in the shoe department in McAlpin's, one of Cincinnati's oldest department stores. From where I sat, I could comfortably observe shoppers coming from both directions toward the intersection of the two main aisles.

A chime sounded. Someone was signaling a sales associate or a manager.

I looked down at the cup of soup the waitress placed in front of me, then turned toward my mother who sat facing her younger cousin across the table. Their profiles were not at all similar, though their mothers were sisters who came together from southern Poland. Cousin Esther's face was rounded and smooth, with a robustness that needed no makeup. Her dark hair was cut short. She smelled of starch and Spearmint gum. My mother's face was haggard; her eyes were red-rimmed and puffy. Her hair, a color between light brown and dark blonde, was lifeless. She smelled of coffee and exhaustion.

We were in the Walnut Room at Marshall Field's. It was October 1944; I was almost four years old. My father had died two months earlier, although my mother didn't know it until the middle of September.

Cousin Esther was home on leave from the WAVES. She had invited us to lunch before she headed for the Illinois Central Station and the train home to Hegewisch. It was the first time they had seen each other since my mother opened the yellow Western Union envelope on our front porch.

The mailman, Tom Dougherty, knew what it was. He had already

delivered hundreds of telegrams with two purple stars stamped at the top. As I watched through the screen door, Tom put his arm around my mother's shoulder to steady her as she read.

"The Navy Department deeply regrets to inform you …," it began.

"Helga, I don't know what to say. When Ma wrote to tell me, I just couldn't believe it," Cousin Esther whispered. She began to sob. "He's gone. Johnny's gone."

I watched a tear run down my mother's cheek, making a tiny furrow in her makeup as it slowly moved toward her chin. Is that her last tear? I wondered. How could there be any left, after so many weeks of crying?

Then, at some invisible signal, my mother and her cousin pushed back their chairs, came around the table, and fell into each other's arms, sobbing.

"Oh, ooh Helen, Helen. *Jesus, Maria,* I'm so, so sorry."

My mother said nothing. She just stared across the Walnut Room as tears ran down her face and onto the shoulder of Cousin Esther's uniform jacket.

I tasted my soup. Cream or asparagus. I liked it.

The chime sounded again.

Serena Belva

Joe Allawos

Sunrise in the window pane
Has woken me this day again.
Looking at the vast expanse
Of tempest flair in garnet hair.
The lightning flashed, the fire formed,
The rant to me I never scorned.
The day I saw you in my dream,
Serena Belva, little queen
Of mountains towering overhead,
Of every living thing alive.
Instead of God, yes, why not she?
As fair as any god could be.
Still fairer still, then God might wish,
And to this could pass for doubt,
Could pass for freedom calling out.
Those tender eyes I eulogize
With flowing thoughts and futile plots,
To coax her into games of lust,
I know that first to gain her trust.
A clever secret ever held,
Within my grasp this fiery rasp
That cuts through skin and flesh and bone
Right to her heartstrings, I expose
And plucked precisely and with care
The song I make floats in the air.
And she cannot resist its charm
The status of a neon spark
Has left my head to now embark
Upon some utter, languid game
What seems so different stays the same.

lips pressed in darkness

Joe Allawos

A perfect fit, lips pressed in the darkness,
No addled confusion here,
Just warmth, embraced, wrapped, joined in
The most sensual fix.
Where spirit, mind, body, heart and soul mix.
Like spun strands threaded through the loom,
Dyed different colors, put together by the woven hand.
By my threaded colors, feed my loom.
Tranquil, peaceful, strong; forever turning, spinning, wearing.
With what grand precision we embraced.
You heated my emotions to a million degrees
Yet even still I tried to deny the longing heart.
I tried to deny my longing heart;
Tried to extinguish the fertile heart;
But you dragged it right out of me;
Like I was some poor, sick leper
Hailed as if by magic power
And the excitement in your bright, elusive eyes.

The Waiting

Ron Layne

Light folds about the Standard to caress

The outline of those strained features that show

No remorse nor hope while white few address

Legions so enraptured they scarcely know

She stands outside their grand councils until

The solitary figure beckons her

And she takes graceful steps against her will

Toward the passing she may yet alter.

The weary legions stir petals as she,

Along with her companion, watches as they

Drift through outstretched hands in carefully

Measured cadence knowing they dare not stay.

She walks with Ophelia, their hands entwine,

While drawing toward their ebony shrine.

Untitled
(Dedicated to Mabel Lowman, my first teaching partner who died in 2004)

Chris Tibbetts

I am drawn to
women of a certain generation.
my mother's generation
yet not my mother.
women who have lived their
lives
fully
with love for themselves
and for others
giving
of their talent
experience
wisdom
humor
without giving up all
of themselves.
my mother's generation,
yet not my mother.
I needed you
to become one of you.
Thank you.

Portland Head Light, Port Elizabeth, Maine
Photo by Lee Schleining

To the Baby-Faced Smoker Standing Outside of Laurel on a February Morning

Randee Goodstadt

The Art of Happiness and a cigarette
Just means you're probably not there yet.

I see your baby face so smooth
I see your adolescent eyes
I see your Goodwill army coat
I hear your disappointed sighs.

So try what all the wise ones say
Try Buddha and the healing arts
Try everything your parents hate
Try to create a brand new start.

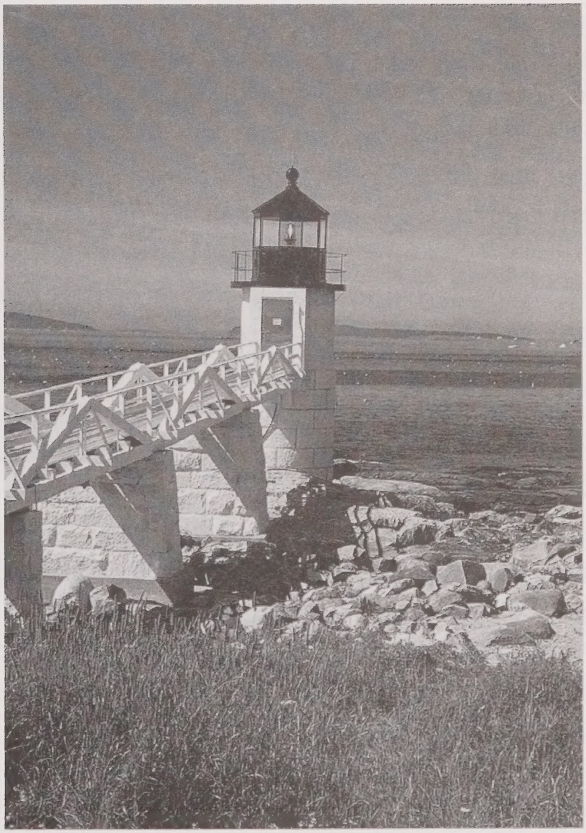
And stand outside the Laurel halls
Stand out in the freezing air
Stand outside the Western World
Let the wind blow through your hair.

And older observers such as I
So well taught by decades past
That harsh taskmaster of our lives
And now our time goes by so fast.

We watch you suffer, watch you try
Watch your mind and body grow
Know the chance that is your youth
Know that years will ebb and flow.

And after all is said and done
What more than this to say to you?
Youth is wasted on the young
And wisdom on the chosen few.

This too shall pass
This too shall pass
This too shall pass
This too shall pass.



Pemaquid Point Lighthouse, Maine
Photo by Lee Schleining

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Joe Allawos teaches Biology in the Division of Arts and Sciences.

Fred Chappell is a native of Canton. He has taught at UNC-G since 1984 and is author of more than a dozen books of verse, two story collections, eight novels, and various books of criticism. He is past NC poet laureate and has won many awards including the Bollingen Prize in Poetry.

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Nancy Dillingham is the author of three books of short stories and poems—*New Ground (1998)*, *The Ambiguity of Morning* (2001), and *First Light* (2003). Her forthcoming book is entitled *Thanks for the Dark but That's Not Home: Poems and Stories*. Her work currently appears in the *Asheville Poetry Review's* tenth anniversary issue. She is an instructor in Adult Basic Skills.

Julia Nunnally Duncan is the author of *Blue Ridge Shadows*, a short story collection (Iris Press, 2002). A second book, *The Stone Carver* and *Other Stories*, is forthcoming from Iris Press, spring 2005. Duncan's novel was named finalist in the 2005 Novello Literary Festival competition, and she is currently revising a poetry collection. She teaches English at McDowell Technical Community College.

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Ron Rash's family has lived in the southern Appalachian mountains since the mid-1770's, and it is this region that is the primary focus of his writing. Rash grew up in Boiling Springs, NC, and graduated from Gardner-Webb and Clemson University. He holds the John Parris Chair in Appalachian Studies at WCU. In 1994 he was awarded an NEA Poetry Fellowship and won the Sherwood Anderson Prize in 1996. In 2001 he won the Novello Festival Award and in 2002 was awarded Foreword Magazine's Gold Medal in Literary Fiction for his novel *One Foot in Eden*. The novel was also named Appalachian Book of the Year. In 2005 he won an O. Henry award for his

story "Speckled Trout." His poetry and fiction have appeared in over eighty journals and magazines, including *Sewanee Review*, *Shenandoah*, and *Poetry*. He is the author of seven books: *The Night the New Jesus Fell to Earth* (short stories), *Casualties* (short stories), *Eureka Mill* (poetry), *Among the Believers* (poetry), *Raising the Dead* (poetry), and *One Foot in Eden* (novel). His second novel, *Saints at the River,* was published by Henry Holt in 2004. In March of 2005 he was awarded the James Still Award by the Fellowship of Southern Writers.

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